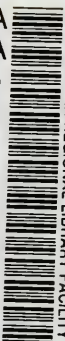


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THE
FORESTERS.

A TALE OF DOMESTIC LIFE.

BY PROFESSOR WILSON,
AUTHOR OF "LIGHTS AND SHADOWS OF SCOTTISH LIFE," AND "THE TRIALS
OF MARGARET LYNDSEY."

BOSTON :
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AMERICAN PREFACE.

THE American edition of the trials of Margaret Lyndsay, having been received with the strongest favor, has induced the publishers to issue the Forsters, of the same author, in a corresponding form. Like the "Trials," it will be found to partake of the same delicious pathos, fidelity of character, deep moral lessons, and a beauty of diction, unsurpassed, and in admirable unison with the subject. Its author has indeed a profound knowledge of the human heart, and though he principally delights in depicting "the lowly joys and destinies obscure" of the humble ranks of life, yet, in the present tale, he has given a brief and faithful portraiture of the fashionable world.

One great merit that characterizes our author's productions is their style of sentiment, widely differing from the sickly and sentimental affectation that pervades the writings of inferior novelists —

it is the sentiment of soul, the very essence of exquisite sensibility ; and we defy the most heartless in perusing this beautiful story, from not having his feelings keenly excited, and his heart expand with better and holier affections to his fellow men.

It is indeed difficult to say which is the most finished character in the *Foresters* — the beautiful, gentle, and spotless Lucy, — the strong-minded, intellectual, and afflicted Michael, — the patient, suffering and virtuous Agnes, — the prodigal and lawless Abel, — the poor scholar, — the mild May Morrison, or the noble Lady of the Hirst. All of these are true and touching pictures of life, and yet so exquisitely finished are the smaller personages in the drama, that any attempt in assigning to either a precedence in merit, would be a nugatory and hypercritical task.

Like the “*Trials of Margaret Lyndsay*,” the scenes and characters are, for the most part, laid in Scotland, and, consequently, the author has done them ample justice. One portion of the story, however, takes place in Cumberland, in England, on the banks of the beautiful lake of Windermere, where is situated the author’s delightful residence of Elleray. It is well known that in his poems, and some of his other productions, he has celebrated the scenery of this beautiful region ; yet, in our humble opinion, it has never been so felicitously and poetically depicted as in the pages of

the Foresters; while, to those who are curious of acquiring a knowledge of this far-famed portion of England, where have resided some of the first of our modern poets, the founders of what is termed the "Lake School of Poetry," we would recommend its perusal.

As, we believe, this is the first American edition of the work, we trust it will meet with a hearty welcome, and that every parent will give it a place in his family; calculated as it is to diffuse moral and religious principles through the medium of a beautiful domestic story. Such are, indeed, books, and their authors the best friends of humanity — they can never perish — they depend not on the fashion of the world, and cannot be out of date, till the dreams of young imagination shall vanish, and the deepest sympathies of love and hope be chilled. "For, while other works are extolled, admired and reviewed, these will be loved and wept over. Gentle hearts shall ever blend their thoughts of his among their remembrances of the benefactors of their youth. And when the favor of the world 'shall hang upon the beauty of their hearts,' how often will their spirits turn to him, who, as he cast a soft seriousness over the morning of life, shall assist in tranquillizing its noon-tide sorrows."

R. H.

THE FORESTERS.

CHAPTER I.

OF the humble mansions that, not many years ago, were thickly interspersed through the romantic scenery of the Esk, between Roslin and Lasswade, there was not one more beautiful than that which bore the appropriate name of Dovenest. It was built on a gentle eminence, that merely lifted it in safety above the highest water-mark of the river, sweeping round the little sylvan peninsula; and the breath of smoke that rose from its hidden chimneys was, even on the calmest day, lost on the broad bosom of the overshadowing wood, before it could reach the naked cliff that rose like a pillar into the sky. Several glades, and even pasture fields, lay concealed at no great distance up and down the stream; and a few steps could, in either direction, lead into prospects of confined but richest cultivation, where the houses of the more opulent looked out cheerfully, each over its own quiet pleasure ground, nor seemed, in their unostentatious retirement, at all out of unison with the character of the solitary or clustering cottages of the poorer inhabitants. But for a fantastic projection of rock, with its crown of drooping birch trees, Dovenest would have commanded a view of the caverned cliffs of Hawthornden, and indeed, even of Roslin Chapel. Although the castle was not visible, the rooks were seen flying over

its turrets; and, on a calm day, the noise of the linn was heard below the foundations of the old place of worship. The village Sabbath bell sent its voice so distinctly down the glen, that it sometimes seemed to be ringing close to the very cottage; and, on a warm, still summer's day, there was but one sound of bees from the broomy knoll of Dovenest, to the wallflowers on the crevices of that hallowed ruin. There was felt to be a little quiet world within itself; and the same stream, the same rocks, the same line of sky, bound together, cottage, chapel, and castle, in one spirit of harmonious beauty.

Dovenest was not a summer retreat for lawyer, citizen, or poet, although it had often been coveted both by matter-of-fact and imaginative men, and its architecture been made to undergo frequent alterations in the day dreams of tasteful artists; but it had been for thirty years the dwelling of its obscure and industrious owner, Adam Forester, a gardener. Adam Forester had been proud of that humble professional name in the prime of life, when his good spade was his only fortune: and he desired no better, in after times, when by skill, labour, and integrity, he had accumulated sufficient capital to purchase that pretty little property, and by degrees, spring after spring, had made his nursery garden the pride of all the glen, and, to idlers from the city, one of its rarest and most delightful attractions. The southern bank, which he had cleared from the embosoming wood, seemed to enjoy perpetual sunshine; and so happily sheltered was it by natural mounds and battlements, that often while there was a storm among the oaks above, not a blossom was shaken from its fruit trees; and the blackbird continued to sing undisturbed from the top of the steady larch that rose single from a grass-plot in the middle of the garden. That larch was famous during early spring, in the perfect beauty of its tapering verdure, and glowing with a million cones of purple that lay profusely scattered over the long graceful branches that swept the mossy floor, up to the slender last year's shoot that scarcely supported the blithsome songster. Nothing

could surpass the order and regularity prevalent over the parterres of flowers, the beds of seedlings, and the wider banks of infant forest trees, already distinguishable in shape and hue of leaf, stalk, and tendril, but all equally unlike the gigantic forms they were destined one day to become in park or mountain. The spirit of young vegetable life wanted everywhere around, below the shadow of the ancient woods; and old Adam Forester, the gardener, unconsciously loved the flowers and plants, among a constant succession of which he had spent upwards of forty not unhappy years. He had not reached his time of life without some heavy griefs; but when he went out to muse at eventide, he felt, like the patriarch of old, that God had to him been a God of mercy, and thought with profound peace of mind on the hour, now assuredly near at hand, when he should be laid in the same grave with the mother of his children — her whom he had buried twenty years ago, but whose image had been with him, to support and console, duly and without fail, at morning and evening prayers.

Adam Forester had enjoyed more of pure and real happiness than often falls to the lot of man in his condition of life, although, perhaps, that be sometimes the very happiest condition in the world. His mind, originally one of strength and sensibility, had received that best of all education — the education which untempted and unperverted nature bestows upon itself, during employment that is laborious but not slavish, and during leisure that is free for much thoughtfulness at least, if not for systematic study, in the interval benignly provided between the two twilights for the refreshment and restoration of every human soul. From youth to manhood, and from manhood to age, he had always been bettering his worldly circumstances: he had never made a single retrograde step in his lowly well-doing; and, while many whom he acknowledged to be better than himself had suffered sore chances and changes, going down in trouble to untimely graves, and others had, in some few instances, become absolute paupers from vice or misfortune, he had thankfully enjoyed continual in-

crease of prosperity, and along with it an enlargement too of heart that enabled him to feel the blessing of Providence. Although he lived in a thatched house, with such temperate appetites as its frugal hearth could easily supply — wore on work days the mean but decent apparel of a labourer — opened his Bible with a hand that labor had hardened — sat on the sabbath in a pew among poor people — interchanged greetings on a footing of perfect equality with every honest individual of that class to whom, by his birth, he belonged — and required for the daily sustenance of his unambitious heart only the simple converse of working men — yet, Adam Forester was not altogether a stranger to the society of persons occupying the more elevated stations of this life, nor in that society did he miss the respect due to his estimable character. In the way of his profession, he had become known to many men of wealth and rank ; and the plain dignity of his manners, especially as age began to add to the lineaments of his countenance, that power of reverence which is superior to that of every mere artificial distinction, was acknowledged by all who had sense to discern and appreciate the natural and unalienable authority of intelligence and virtue.

Dovenest, therefore, although thus beautiful in its own seemingly romantic world, had never been the scene of any other joys and sorrows than such as belong necessarily and essentially to human nature in every condition. The worthy owner had suffered many domestic afflictions, but all in the common course of nature ; and with a wife who tenderly and reverently loved him, and had discharged every duty towards him and their children in joyfulness and gratitude, he had lived many long peaceful years. During those years an infant — a child — one blooming girl — a boy of much promise — and, saddest loss of all, a son grown up to manhood — had been taken away, suddenly, or after lingering decay. Five funerals had there indeed been, before that blackest of them all, when the mother was carried to her rest. But these deprivations had been scattered over the length of full thirty years. Mercifully timed, it might be said,

had been the visits of the angel of death. And although there not unfrequently had been seasons when smiles, or at least any thing approaching to laughter, would have grated against the heart-strings of the whole saddened family, and when it almost seemed as if their happiness were never more to deserve that name, yet natural distress gradually yielded to natural comfort, and the survivors carried over upon one another, and into one another's hearts, the affection that had belonged to them that were no more seen, except in the startling visions of sudden waking recollection, or in the dreams of sleep.

Even the affliction that made Adam Forester a widower, brought with it healing upon its wings. For, when his Judith died, she was not cut off suddenly in the prime of life, nor did she pine away in its fall; but, after the gray hairs had been visibly mingled with the once bright brown, an illness, neither frightfully short nor tryingly prolonged, extinguished the lamp of life that burned clearly to the close; and, with all the most anxious solitudes of a mother's heart at rest, she was resigned to shut her eyes upon her husband and her two dutiful sons. Her sober matronly steps and quiet smiles were no more seen, and, in a few years, generally forgotten. But, in not a few neighboring families, her image remained, as if her picture had hung upon the wall; and the poor continued to bless her who had not only relieved their hunger, but had given charity to their friendless souls. The lines of labor and advancing age were painfully deepened on the widower's face during the year she left him, and the neighbors all prognosticated that he would never recover the blow. But theirs was a common mistake; the old man was not forsaken in his bereavement; in a few weeks he took his place in his pew in the kirk; the lark called him to his garden, not, perhaps, from such sleep as he had once enjoyed; and although they who knew him intimately saw a change in all his demeanor, and heard a difference in the usual tones of his speech, yet, to indifferent observers, he was the same active, industrious, old man as before. Nor did Dovenest undergo any perceptible diminution

of its cheerful neatness, except that there seemed about it a less gorgeous flush of flowers than formerly, and that the lustre of the latticed windows was not so spotless, and somewhat more thickly overgrown, now that one pruning hand was cold. But Adam Forester, in his more awful hours, was not without a source of comfort, that every year flowed deeper and deeper in the midnight silence; while, in his ordinary work day life in the open air, he had the best of earthly solaces, in a fair reputation, health yet unimpaired, a sound understanding, and a clear conscience; a sufficient competence against the evil of eld, two dutiful sons, and, above all, the love of labor, strong as that of life itself, that subdues within the heart a thousand vain anxieties, and changes the stern law of necessity, against which many fruitlessly rebel, into the voluntary choice of a calm and well-ordered life.

On the death of his wife, Adam Forester had been left with two sons, Michael and Abel. They had both received a regular education, and possessed more than ordinary abilities. Michael had, at one time, thought of becoming a clergyman, and had attended the university; but, on his mother's death, he felt it to be impossible to leave his father alone, and being fonder every month of that way of life, and deeply attached to the place of his birth, he resolved to follow his father's employment, and had now done so for many years. He was a man of staid deportment and quiet manners, but of deep and strong feelings — it may, indeed, be said passions — and of extraordinary strength of intellect. But he had no worldly ambition, and was satisfied to live the same homely and obscure life with his father. He was enough of a scholar to be able to read the Old and New Testaments in their original tongues; and his favorite studies, next to theology, circumscribed as they necessarily became, were natural history and astronomy. Each year brought, independently of reading, its own growth of inward knowledge; and Michael Forester of Dovenest, had long been esteemed the first man in all the neighborhood for general talents, and sound prac-

tical information in the business of life. His whole appearance betokened no ordinary character; and, although he did not purposely keep aloof from the young men of the place, his infinite and unapproachable superiority was felt by them all, and he was looked upon as the equal of the parish minister, and other persons of education and authority. Proud was the old man of such a son, but it was a pride that now and then only made its way into a heart fortified with a far higher principle — that of religious gratitude; and, as they worked in their garden together, the gray-headed father would sometimes rest his withered hand on his spade, and, leaning over it as if to pause from his work, bless his son in a fervent prayer, nor care if his dim eyes poured down upon the ground a shower of passionate tears. Working together, day after day, from morning to night, and sitting together every evening, there was often long silence between them, but never any dearth of inward thoughts; and each heart was as fertile of affectionate feelings as the soil of the garden beneath the common labor of their hands. The very helplessness of old age was felt to be a happy state in the presence of such a protector; and, when the old man would lay himself down, during the heat of the day, beneath the shadow of the sycamores, for a single hour of rest, reluctantly availing himself of the privilege of threescore and ten years, his closing eyes could not help seeing, in his dutiful son, as it were the figure of an angel watching over his sleep.

Abel, the younger brother, although now far less deserving than Michael, was, notwithstanding, almost as dear to his father; for strong instinctive affection will not yield to the law of descent, and the frailties, the follies, and even sins of children, will often mournfully endear them to their parents. Abel, too, in face, in eyes, the color of hair, and the tone of voice, was the very image of his mother; and grievous as had been his misconduct, that overpowering resemblance had never pleaded for him in vain. There was also much that was redeeming in his amiable but uncertain character; and

how could a father long retain wrath, or even strong displeasure towards one so ready to repent, so warm in his affections, and, when away from evil associates, so perfectly winning in all his ways, and so reconciled even to an active and industrious life? Lively, versatile, and ingenious — he was, indeed, when at home, the light and the music of the house and garden; and the old man thought, and still thought, and fondly deluded himself into conviction, often broken and as often repaired, that Abel was about to reform, and to become a credit to him, like Michael, in his declining days. Although Abel had not yet absolutely disgraced himself by any dishonest or dishonorable action, a mist hung over his reputation both in town and country; his few known associates were persons of profligate habits; rumors were afloat in the neighborhood of an indefinite, but distressing kind; and it was the belief of all that, ere long, he would bring himself to disgrace and ruin. His father tried to shut both his eyes and his ears, but still he saw and heard enough to fill his mind with dismal apprehensions; and, now that all the past was peace — now that he could look, not only without one single pang on the gravestone above his Judith, and the other five dead ones, all of them long ago so tenderly beloved, but even with the profound satisfaction of expecting rest — he felt it cruel to be disturbed, almost at death's door, by a son to whom he had been, perhaps, but too indulgent, and whose errors seemed, month after month, to be darkening into wickedness. O that Abel were reformed! thought often the old man — and that prayer was sometimes worded in his sleep — then might I yield up my spirit to its Maker! Abel knew well his father's grief, and often wept bitterly, like a child, before his tremulous rebuke — too like a child, for his tears were soon dried; gay smiles, too delightful to a forgiving father, took their place, and, after the deep but transient calm of reconciliation which Abel had a heart tender enough to feel, but not firm enough to remember, away he flew like a bird, and disappeared, for months, in the unknown dissipation and vice of the city. "My boy

loves me as kindly as ever, but he reverences me no more, and my power over him is but as of a shadow. O Michael! when I am dead, try to save poor Abel; for if evil befall him, methinks my bones will not rest in the grave!"

Such words as these were not lost upon Michael; for, independently of his filial reverence, he loved his brother Abel with exceeding affection. Indeed, the very difference in their characters, pursuits, and habits, endeared them to each other; and while the elder brother could not help being won by that mirth and merriment, that frolic and whim, so foreign to his own nature, but so congenial with the whole frame of Abel's, that unthinking boy could not but venerate in Michael that irreproachable practice and those uncompromising principles in which he found himself to be so deplorably deficient in the hour of trial. The disparity in their age also, (for Michael was the elder by upwards of ten years,) gave an endearing character to their mutual affection. It had always preserved between them an unbroken integrity of feeling, without the deadening or alienating interruptions of jealous or angry moods. Abel no more thought of ever quarrelling with Michael than with his father himself; and if ever Michael had occasion to chide or reprove him, the remonstrance was indeed fatherly, in spirit and in word, tempered at the same time by the sense of the feeble authority of brotherhood, and breathed forth as a confidential communication between friend and friend.

"You must not think that I love Abel better than you, Michael, although sometimes it would even seem as if the dear unhappy boy did indeed drive you out of my heart. No — no — no — you, Michael, are my best beloved son — boy, lad, and man the same — true at all times to me, your aged father, and to your God. If ever I have been silent, cold, harsh, or sullen towards you, my son, I ask your forgiveness, for, in truth, age chills even something of the warmth at a father's heart."

The father and son were sitting together on a bench in a sort of small natural arbor that faced the light of the

setting sun; and as Michael looked on the old man's face, he felt that he had never before noticed the wrinkles so deep, nor seen over all his countenance so strong a shadow of the world to come. He knelt down and asked a blessing. Tenderness and awe were like a religion in his spirit; and as the withered hands were laid upon his head, he felt as if a human parent were interceding for him with a divine, and that such prayers would not be unheard in heaven. At that moment light footsteps were heard, and Abel stood before the opening of the arbor.

There was a wild and unsettled expression in his eyes, a feverish flush over his cheeks, and his whole demeanor was disturbed. Self-dissatisfaction and shame, mixed with an angry recklessness, sadly obscured that face on which, a few years ago, every one that knew it looked with pleasure and affection. Yet the unhappy youth could not now divest himself of that respect, that veneration with which he had from his very heart always treated his father. The scowl which he had summoned to his brow gave way before the solemn look of the old man's dim eyes, and, struck at once into remorse for the mere show of disrespect to his father, Abel hung down his head and wept. When he found voice, he said — "Father, I am going to leave Dovenest for good and all, and to-morrow I set off for England with Will Mansell. You must not ask me any questions — I could not think of going without coming to ask your forgiveness and your blessing." The old man, who had long feared the worst of his son, now felt that the worst had almost befallen him; for Mansell was a man of a ruined reputation, and known to be familiar with criminals. "Yes — yes — Abel, here is my blessing — and my forgiveness;" and the old man rose up and kissed his undutiful son, with many tears. Meanwhile, Michael retired a short distance from the arbor, and when he returned to take farewell of his brother, Abel was gone. "O Michael, when I am dead — and this parting has taken some months from the year I might have had to live — never lose your pity for Abel, for much I fear will he stand in need of pity, hurrying on to disgrace or destruction." "My brother shall never

want," said Michael, "while these hands have strength to work — while there is water in the channel of the Esk, and corn grows upon its banks. But I will go after him, and perhaps he will return to his father's house." — "No, Michael; he will never return; never in my time, at least — and if he does return, it will be as a wretched beggar — ay, worse than a beggar, a criminal — flying perhaps from justice, and his life forfeit to the law."

That severe passion of grief did not, however, endure long in a heart that, in all its sufferings, had found what strength there is in submission. The old man hearkened to comfort from his elder son, and tried to convince himself that his fears might prove to have been altogether ungrounded. And a letter from Abel, about a month after, written in a kind and cheerful spirit, restored him apparently to his usual composure, so that it might be said that Dovenest was again happy.



CHAPTER II.

AMONG the lowly households closely connected in ancient friendship with the family at Dovenest, there was none so dear on any account as that of Sprinkeld — a cottage that stood by itself in a sheltered holm, a few fields from Lasswade. It had been built by a native of the village, a prosperous tradesman, who died in the prime of life, leaving a widow and one daughter. His widow did not long survive him; and the child was left to the care of a female relation who had resided in the family, and who loved the orphan, Agnes Hay, as tenderly as if she had been her mother. This excellent person had lost her husband many years before, and had no children. Her whole income consisted of the very moderate jointure which she enjoyed as the widow of a clergyman, from the best of all charitable institutions;

but this, added to the little fortune of her ward, was a complete independence, and enabled them to lead the same life to which they had been accustomed, without difficulty or privation. Agnes Hay had, therefore, never felt what it is to be an orphan. She had lost both her parents before she was eight years old ; and at that innocent and joyful age, less than one single summer suffices to wipe away the bitterest tears, although their source is still left open in the unpainful affection of the heart. Perhaps those early afflictions gave a somewhat deeper tone of pensiveness to a character naturally thoughtful and sedate ; and, no doubt, the remembrances of her dead parents survived more distinctly and tenderly in that retired and almost solitary life. Being an only child, and having had few playmates, her thoughts and feelings naturally reverted to the past, so that the bygone happiness of her childhood was never entirely forgotten, but continued to blend itself with all those unsought enjoyments which nature graciously provides for the expanding affections. Few incidents or events had occurred to diversify her calm and contented life, nor had any strong emotions ever disturbed the tranquillity of her innocence. Each succeeding Sabbath found her humbly trusting in that contrite spirit which even the most innocent must feel when joining in the services of religion ; and weeks, months, and years had glided by, leaving her now in the prime of youth, a favorite with all the families in the neighborhood, even with those to whom she was hardly more known than by appearance or name ; while at those firesides where she was a familiar guest, she was beloved with a perfect love for all those delightful endowments that showed themselves more attractively in the unconscious simplicity of her mild and gentle manners, and almost veiled her beauty itself under that charm of character which, belonging peculiarly to the gifted individual, is felt to be at once permanent and irresistible.

Neither Michael Forester nor Agnes Hay knew that they were in love with each other. Indeed, for two or three years past, it had almost seemed as if there had been some slight shadow thrown over the friendship of

the two families. Accidental causes, such as will often arise in the least varied lot, had made the footpath less frequently trodden that led from Dovenest to Sprinkeld. But where there is sincere and well-founded mutual affection in good hearts, it remains unimpaired among all hindrances, interruptions, or absence. Pleasant remembrances of words and looks supply the place of actual interchanges of kindness; and, perhaps, the softened images of innocent delight, returning of their own accord upon our hearts, do more than anything else in this world to attach us to those with whom that delight had been enjoyed. Agnes Hay was frequently hearing the character of Michael Forester spoken of by those whom she most respected in terms of the highest praise — his talents, his industry, his uprightness, and, what was even more touching to her heart than them all, his filial piety, and his fond attachment to his infatuated brother. Sometimes she thought what happiness it would have been had she been his daughter, or his sister, or any near blood relation, so that she might have had the privileges of an inmate of his household. She had, indeed, scarcely one single relation living but Aunt Isobel, as she had called from her infancy the good old lady who was her protectress. Such thoughts passed through her heart oftener than she was aware, but without any disturbance of feeling; for, although she interchanged affectionate greetings with Michael Forester every Sabbath at church, and not unfrequently saw him on ordinary week-day occasions, her heart was entirely free from passion. Never had she fallen into one single vain dream of him and his dwelling; so that had he married another, it did not seem to Agnes that such an event would have affected, or at least diminished the happiness of her contented life. And yet, when Aunt Isobel, in speaking of his excellence, had once said, what a happy woman would be the wife of Michael Forester, Agnes had unconsciously turned away her face; and, as she did so, her eyes fell upon the geraniums in all their rich and variegated glow which she had received from him, and had tended with assiduous care, as she herself thought, entirely for the sake of their own beauty.

With Michael Forester the case was somewhat different. He was fifteen years older than Agnes; and although the growing charms of her womanhood had gradually inspired him with far other feelings than those with which he had been accustomed to regard the pretty little child that he had often led by the hand through his gardens, and sent away, happy as a fairy, with a bunch of flowers, yet a sense of the disparity of years, which to him seemed far greater than it was in reality, kept down, as if it were even in his conscience, any fonder affection for Agnes as she had been stealing into the beauty of her prime. It seemed impossible that she could love him; and that belief in the mind of such a man, overcame all vain hopes, and reconciled him, without much pain, to the thought of some day seeing Agnes Hay the wife of another. He therefore strove with himself, and not altogether unsuccessfully, not indeed to abstain from her society, for that was impossible, but to regard her at all times as one to whom he could never be more than a friend, or a brother, or a father. Sometimes, in the quiet of a beautiful summer evening, when, in his silent leisure, his mind unconsciously framed pictures of the future, he felt that to Anger Hay he could be all these, and more, far more than them all; that to see her beautiful countenance at that lattice window — her delightful figure walking along that green — her white arms employed in training the roses around the trellice work of that humble porch — to hear her name him in the familiar words of love, and tune her soft voice especially for his ear — thoughts like these did sometimes indeed overpower him — for he had led a pure and unstained life — vice had withered not one fibre of his heart — he had wasted none of his best emotions on unworthy objects — so that his visions of domestic happiness were bright and strong, and he looked on them with the same solemn, devout, and sacred spirit with which, on the Sabbath day, he entered the place set apart for worship. But still the belief recurred that Agnes could not love him — that she would one day be another man's wife; and in depriving himself of the dangerous enjoyment of his own loving, almost impassioned thoughts, he felt that such self-denial

brought its own recompense, and heightened that happiness which Providence had allowed him to enjoy without either fear or blame, and which he humbly acknowledged was sufficient for contentment and gratitude.

One beautiful Sabbath evening, Michael Forester was walking by himself along the banks of the Esk, and met Agnes Hay going to Roslin to bring home her aunt, who had that day attended divine service in that church. The meeting at such a time, and in such a state of their affections, was felt by them both to be more than usually happy. Agnes took Michael's arm with cheerful willingness, and they spoke of everything most interesting to the welfare of their respective homes. The sweet serenity of the afternoon was in perfect unison with that of their own hearts; and Agnes, the orphan Agnes, with such a friend by her side, felt as calmly confident of the duration of her peace, as if she had had a hundred kind and rich relations alive, and the future provided and fenced in against the intrusion of any earthly calamities. All the woods were ringing with vernal delight and joy; and her countenance, whose general character was meek and pensive, was now tinged with the very light of gladness; her steps, usually so graceful in their composure, were now no less so in the buoyancy of exhilaration; and without doing the slightest violence to the native and prevalent modesty of her demeanour, the innocent creature's perfect happiness enlivened every attitude and every motion, while not altogether unconscious, perhaps, of the power of her beauty, she stepped over stone and stalk, on their devious hill-side track, through the overhanging trees whose branches sometimes almost impeded their progress, and touched their heads with the first odorous buds of an early spring.

Dovenest and its gardens lay before them at a sudden bend of the river. The cushat dove was sounding his deep song in the pines behind the low thatched roof; and in front, the bright golden oak, whose foliage preceded by at least a fortnight that of all the other trees, shone in the setting sun. "Will you cross the stepping-stones, my dear Agnes, and see how this spring promises

in our gardens? You have not been within our gate once during this finest and most forward of all Aprils, and to-morrow is May-day." Agnes was glad to comply; and they descended into the channel of the river, where, at the head of a stream that formed a small waterfall, there was a natural ledge of rock, over which, when the water was low, it was easy to cross the Esk. The showery April had however slightly flooded the stream, and while Agnes was speaking of going round by the wooden bridge, Michael Forester took her gently in his arms, and, in a few moments, let her down from his breast, in all her blushing beauty, on the turf of his own paternal acres. The heart within that manly breast, by habit and duty in general so calm, beat as loudly as if it were the heart of fear itself in an unexpected peril. Her pure breath had been close to his cheek, closer than it had ever before been since she was a child, and he had felt on his side, the motion of that virgin bosom, where purity, innocence, and loveliness were folded up together in most beautiful repose. "She is an orphan," thought Michael — "O that this very blessed day I could win her heart!" and hope came to him from the unoffended expression of her downcast eyes, as they walked arm in arm towards his house. Few words were uttered by him — and none by Agnes — till they entered the little white gate, with its arch of woodbine and sweet-briar; and as it closed behind them, Michael Forester felt suddenly that what he loved most on this earth was now within the boundaries of his own dwelling. Dearer was she to him than all his other best and happiest possessions — than all other remembrances — all other hopes — even than his father's grey hairs. Yet at the very time that he thus knew, in the tumult of his heart, that the fair and meek orphan was, and must for ever be to him life itself, and that without her life would be as death, yet his other human affections were not lost or swallowed up in that stronger love, but rather all comprehended within its influence, so that he loved both father and brother, and his other friends, better for the sake of his own Agnes Hay.

With a faltering voice, which he in vain tried to compose, Michael Forester said, with great tenderness—"The time was, Agnes, when you came almost every day to Dovenest; then it was only week after week; now I may say it is only month after month; and in future, perhaps, it may be only year after year. Yet it might be better for me if it were so; for, Agnes, you will be the wife of another soon, perhaps; and, whenever that happens, may the blessing of God fall upon you; but from that day shall I be the most miserable of men. I love you, Agnes; but I know that you cannot love me—it is impossible!" And as the image of the fair child passed before him, dancing along the very walk where they now stood, with garlands of flowers wreathed round her small waist and arms, he felt with a pang that Agnes could not now look on him as a lover, whom she must have so long regarded with such other feelings; and he remained silent in his despair.

The whole heart of Agnes Hay seemed to herself to have undergone a deep change since she had met Michael only an hour ago; but, in truth, she had for years loved him in the undisturbed innocence of her gentle nature. She had, oftener than she knew, thought of him, as a certain despondency would sometimes come over her when musing on her orphan state; and therefore this avowal of his love, although wholly unexpected, did not find her altogether unprepared. The words, heard at first with a delightful doubt of their meaning, reached, before Michael had ceased speaking, the very core of her heart; and never having had any attachment to any other person, beyond that of mere ordinary kindness, she felt that she could give him all that her life had ever contained, without reserve of one single transitory feeling. "Impossible to love Michael Forester!—no—no—say not so—I have loved you ever; and I will love you as long as I know to love all that is good, worthy, and most estimable in a Christian husband." That one last word was sufficient for Michael Forester's perfect happiness; and he folded this beautiful orphan in as warm and reverential an embrace as ever brought woman to man's beating bosom.

They walked for a while, silent and composed, through the dewy arbors; and stood, hand in hand, beside the dial, shadowless at the sweet hour of eight, in the last dewy evening of April. All around was orderly, peaceful, prosperous, and beautiful. Then, as if by the same impulse, they bent their way towards the house; and Michael fervently blessed his Agnes as she stepped across the threshold. They sat down together in the neat little parlor, whose window looked up the Esk, upon a home scene hemmed in by a fantastic sweep of wooded rocks. The large family Bible was lying open on the table; and Michael, taking the hand of his Agnes, laid it upon the sacred volume, and in that betrothment, with a reverential prayer of thanksgiving, they vowed to love one another until death. Agnes shed a few tears over the blessed page; but they were such tears as nature consecrates to her best affections, and assuredly were not of evil omen. Michael Forester kissed others away from her sweet eyes, as her head rested upon his breast; and in that tender and sacred embrace, in which he folded his betrothed, and in which a pious spirit expressed its gratitude to Heaven for an unhopèd and boundless happiness, Agnes felt, beyond all possibility of being deceived, that she had committed her lot in this life to a man who knew the value of innocence, and in wedlock would cherish and respect it. But voices were heard near the porch; and although Agnes knew well whose they were, and had nothing to fear from such intruders, yet a new tremor crept over her at their approach, and her heart that had beat tranquilly in the arms of her lover, palpitated violently as she arose to meet her own Aunt Isobel and old Adam Forester.

A few words from Michael explained the reason of all those unusual tears, and that speechless confusion. Aunt Isobel could not but give herself some little credit for having always internally predicted that this would be a marriage some day; but now that her few doubts and misgivings were removed, and she found that she was in good truth a prophetess, she could not help weeping in her joy, as she thought that now, die when she might,

her beloved orphan would not be left desolate. The old man had always loved Agnes as his own child, and had sometimes allowed himself to wish that Abel had been deserving of such a wife. Now that his eyes were opened to what he had never before suspected, and saw Michael in possession of such a treasure, he blessed her with a fervent voice, and pronounced her name, as if he dwelt upon the sound; for the name of the daughter he had lost was Agnes, and he had read it but a few hours ago on her gravestone. The thought of poor Abel and his cureless follies passed across the old man's mind, and he felt that if that dear boy would but repent and reform, it would be a blessed lot to be gathered with the dead, for that then the whole happiness possible to human life would have been his, and it would therefore be time to depart. But the closing shades of evening warned the party to break up — the stars were already faintly visible — and Agnes, who did not forget others in her own happiness, feared that Aunt Isobel might suffer from the cold dews. So, in a few minutes, they left Dovenest; but not before the evening psalm had been sung, in which the voice of Agnes, silvery sweet, but somewhat tremulous, touched Michael's heart, in his own house, with a profounder emotion than his nature had ever experienced before; while the old man, unable to withstand the beauty of its holiness, could not continue his part in the sacred melody, but bowed down his head, and, with a broken voice, breathed a few words of thanksgiving.



CHAPTER III.

FEW ostentatious ceremonies marked these humble nuptials; yet decent preparations had been made for their change of life, and the marriage day of Michael Forester and Agnes Hay was almost a kind of holiday in Lasswade and its neighborhood. Some little idle gossip there had, no doubt, been about the happy couple, for at least a

month before the union; for Agnes was not only beautiful, but an heiress; and it is surprising what interest some good people take in the dearest concerns of those with whom they are not perhaps at all acquainted, but for whom they hold themselves entitled even to judge and decide, from the single circumstance of having seen them at church or market. Some wise critics in marriage matters could not help thinking that Michael Forester, although a most excellent man, was somewhat too old and grave for so very young and lovely a bride, and were anxious to justify that opinion by adding some ten years to his useful life. Some conscientious persons again, were much afraid that Agnes Hay, who had been bred up daintily under the care of her aunt, who, it was well known, had always taken upon herself the whole trouble of housekeeping, would make but an indifferent wife to a man who had followed a laborious profession, and would probably expect more activity and frugality than it was likely he would find in a young woman spoiled by ease and indulgence. Others wondered, and of their wondering could find no end, what would become of poor Mrs. Irvine? Young Mrs. Forester would surely never be so heartless as to leave her by herself at her advanced time of life; and yet, should she take the good old lady with her to Dovenest, who could say to a certainty that she would prove agreeable to the husband, or to his father, who was well known to be rather a particular sort of man, of perfect integrity, but of a very imperfect temper?

These serious topics had been very seriously discussed at the tea-tables of Lasswade, Roslin, and their neighborhood; and had given rise to many clashing and conflicting opinions. All anxiety, however, in the public mind about Aunt Isobel was removed; for, even on the very marriage day, she went with her dearly beloved Agnes from Sprinkeld to Dovenest. Her own parlor there had been prepared for her weeks before; and a pretty parlor it was — the very same in which she had first known that Michael and Agnes had pledged their troth; with a low roof, and one window down to the floor — a window that,

but for weekly pruning, would soon have been blinded by the clustering roses; and from which she could see a little waterfall, woods, and rocks; on either side, a few pasture fields, here and there the roof of a half-hid house, or the blue smoke from chimneys concealed entirely in the groves of Dryden.

The summer months passed over Dovenest in perfect happiness; and that silent and somewhat melancholy spirit that, for a few years, had lain on the house and grounds, was now almost wholly dispelled. Although the old man could never, for one day, forget his Abel, yet Agnes filled up the void in his heart. In all things she was indeed a daughter. There was no interference, however slight, with his habits, formed insensibly during the lapse of so many years — no hindrance from household arrangements ever met him in any of his own peculiar ways, from morning to night — no formal officiousness ever caused him trouble by its ill-timed attempts to prevent or remove it — no unimportant word — no unsympathising look ever made him feel that there was a separation between the souls of the old and young. But Agnes, from the first week of her abode at Dovenest, had felt and understood, with the delicate and fine discrimination of a loving nature, the prevalent spirit of the household. In the fearless confidence of an affection which was to endure for life, she gently took upon herself the management of all those little concerns necessary for her father's comfort, and walked about the place with as familiar and unrestrained a happiness, as if she had herself been born in the house, and had attended on her father from the earliest years of moral reason. Sprinkled itself, pleasant place as it was, and the scene of her whole previous happy life, was not forgotten, but removed, as it were, far back into the distance of years. For in her husband's house was her whole heart centred — beyond the white garden gate her thoughts never strayed — and all the beautiful or affecting images, which other happy days and scenes had supplied, were now all collected together within the bounds of Dovenest. A thousand delightful visits which she had made there long ago, and

had forgotten, now rose distinctly to her remembrance; she recollected the voice, the figure, the occupation, the kindness to her, then a child, of him who was now her husband; and in all those renewals of the past, made involuntarily, and by the mere force of affection, there was nothing different from what she now experienced; but, although at that time imperfectly understood, the same goodness, integrity, and peace had been witnessed, within whose bosom she now lived in love and gratitude.

Michael Forester led, outwardly, just his usual life; but the whole world had to him undergone a sudden and blessed transformation. Hitherto, he had been happy in the cultivation and enlargement of his intellect—in the discharge of his duties—and in the indulgence of filial and paternal affection. These pleasures were with him still; but now a being, simpler, purer, more innocent far—more benignant towards all her fellow-creatures, and more entirely pious to her Creator than he felt it possible that he himself, or any other man could be—laid herself and her whole life in trust within his bosom. Such blessedness, only a few months before, he had not even ventured to imagine, much less to hope. Agnes Hay he indeed had always loved, but only as one most fair and good, who was to be nothing more to him, and everything to some happier man. Now, their lives were blended together, and he felt his whole character elevated and purified by the union. Not a day now passed without absolute happiness, without calm and deep enjoyment. Every day was now divided into hours of different delight; so that life itself, which formerly escaped away unnoticed—year following year in confusion within the memory—seemed now to be prolonged by the continual and uninterrupted succession of employments for the hand and the heart, each giving way to the other, but when over, still all remembered.

Adam Forester now worked but seldom, and when he did, only for his amusement. This, his son insisted upon; for there was no need to conceal from his father that his strength was much decayed, and that his work days were over. We know not what causes within the

soul may affect, for good or evil, the body of old age. It seemed as if all Abel's misconduct, and even his desertion of home, had not touched the old man's frame so strongly as the perfect happiness with which he now saw himself surrounded. That happiness had given a shock — a gentle one no doubt, but still not unperceived — to that frame which had borne, undepressed and unfaltering, the weight of three-score and ten laborious years; with all their inevitable anxieties and sorrows. His hand, long so steady, had now more than a slight tremble when lifted up in prayer; even with his glasses he could read the Word of God no more: but the voice of Agnes, soft and low as it was, was still not indistinctly heard by his now dulled ear, when louder tones were all undistinguishable; and on her arm alone would he lean in his Sabbath walk along the Esk, and confess to her, his dutiful daughter, that an unpainful sense of weakness told him to hold himself ready for perhaps a sudden summons. But such solemn thoughts were reserved for solemn times; and so cheerful were his ordinary converse and demeanor, that it was remarked by all his neighbors, that although there might be a change for the worse in his bodily frame, yet that the youth of Adam Forester's mind seemed indeed to have been renewed.

But the happiness of this household would have been incomplete without Aunt Isobel. She was indeed the most lively and cheerful of all possible old ladies, blest with untameable good spirits, and that happy constitutional temperament that cannot abide the pressure of unnecessary or undue sorrows. Having been all her life long, from mere childhood, thrown upon her own resources, and accustomed to a busy, bustling, and careful life, all her energetic qualities had been cultivated to the utmost, and she looked upon idleness as at once the greatest of sins and of punishments. She was always doing something, and would have found some regular employment even in the solitary cell of a prison. Yet, although constantly on the alert, she was never teasing nor troublesome in her activity; although perpetually moving about, she was never in any body's way; and, in

the midst of her multifarious concerns, she always wore a smiling face, as if perfectly mistress of her business, and sure of the result — which result was never her own ease, of which she at no time thought, but the ease, comfort, or happiness of others. She was not much of a literary woman, although her powers of wit, humor, and raillery, would have set many a blue-stocking aghast; but, nevertheless, she had her album. A formidable quarto it was, and therein had she copied, in a neat old-fashioned hand, full of dexterous contractions, and in an orthography original and ingenious, almost every receipt, however recondite, known to the then culinary world. Indeed, that book of magic told how best to do everything that could be done in any house, from hall to hut. And although Aunt Isobel had never had an opportunity of displaying her knowledge and powers on a very splendid scale, yet had it been acknowledged by the whole world that Sprinkeld was a perfect model of the most beautiful order and neatness that ever was seen, and that everything within doors, just as without, seemed to go on of itself by some natural process, change succeeding change, without any apparent effort, like the very season.

With a heart full of tenderness, and alive to every kind human feeling, Mrs. Irvine, for that was Aunt Isobel's name, made no pretence to sensibility. On the contrary, she was much averse to the shedding of tears, which she thought should be reserved for solemn occasions, frequent enough, as she had herself experienced, in this uncertain world. Although the most charitable of Christians, in thought, word, and deed, she disliked the whining even of real poverty and distress; and often gave alms with a severe countenance, which some finer spirits might probably think dimmed the merit and marred the beauty of the charitable deed. But Mrs. Irvine thought neither of the merit nor the beauty of her limited charities — they were from a kind, humble, and pious heart; and she thought her Maker would be best pleased when he beheld her relieving, under his providence, the wants of the worthy, and sometimes even giving unto the vicious and the wicked, since their wants are indeed the greatest

and the most mournful that can befall the children of men. Her's was a deep, still, unostentatious religion, that but slightly colored her outward demeanor upon week days; but duly as the Sabbath came, her whole appearance, person, and deportment, were calmed and elevated. Every worldly care, however laudable in itself at other times, was now thrown aside with her weekly garments; those quick busy steps became composed and even dignified; that sharp shrill voice was subdued into a pleasant lowness; her face, which had never at any time been more than comely, but always expressive of goodness and intelligence, was now almost beautiful in its tranquillity, with her gray hair decently braided over her open and yet unwrinkled forehead; and as, in her black silk gown, which were her widow's weeds thirty years ago, and had never been worn but on Sabbaths, she took her place in the pew in her kirk, and placed before her the Bible which her husband had given her on her wedding day, there was not perhaps in all the congregation one more like a lady than she, if such a distinction may be thought of in such a place, while assuredly there was not one more truly a Christian.

How then could the family at Dovenest be otherwise than happy? It seemed to Michael and Agnes as if the first summer of their marriage, even independently of their own joy, was most especially beautiful. Never, in the memory of Adam Forester himself, had there been so many soft, warm, and dewy nights, so many cloudless and sunbright days. In spring the frost had spared the blossoms — the summer insects had not touched the fruits — and the autumn had come mildly to gather her ripened riches.



CHAPTER IV.

THE merry Christmas week was just over, with all its festivities, and the new year had begun to open auspiciously.

ciously on the family at Dovenest, when, one forenoon, a stranger, of most respectable appearance, came into the garden and enquired for Michael Forester. They retired into an inner room, and the visiter did not take his leave for upwards of an hour. Michael accompanied him to the gate, and on his return into the house, his disturbed and troubled countenance did not for a moment escape the notice of his wife. Indeed, she had never before seen her husband so agitated, and knew well enough that something most disastrous must have happened. Her fears were instantly for Abel; although she could not help dimly apprehending some evil personal to Michael himself, so haggard and even ghastly was the expression of his long, dark, and gloomy silence. She followed him into his room, and, sitting down by his side, took hold of his hand, and looked up to his face, but without smiling or uttering a word. Her husband looked on her with gentle, but sad and even weeping eyes, and, folding her to his bosom, said — “Abel has ruined himself and all of us forever. Yes, Agnes, he has beggared us all; and, O Agnes! what is worse, far far worse than beggary, he has committed a fearful and a fatal crime — is a forger and a felon — may die the death of shame — and the white head of the old man may yet be brought to the dust in agony and dishonor. Yes, it will kill him. Abel has murdered his father — Abel whom he loved so tenderly — Abel whom he will yet weep over in forgiveness, when his tongue no more is able to pronounce a blessing. Poor, lost, unhappy boy! we will all of us forgive him. And, O Agnes! that the wide sea were now rolling between him and us, so that the dreadful arm of the law might not reach him, and his life be safe, from the cruelty of justice, in a foreign land!”

The time had now come, soon and unexpectedly, when Agnes felt herself called upon to exert that power which her heart told her resided in its pious innocence. No repining pang shot through that instructed heart — no selfish grief, when thus told suddenly that poverty was to be her lot — no woeful disappointment of lawful hopes which it had been her duty to cherish — no vain wish —

no idle thoughts flung back to the independent retirement of Sprinkeld — but with the whole passion of love that existed in her nature, she embraced her husband's neck, and, with every kindest and most encouraging word, addressed to his own ear, mingled prayers of holiest fervor for his peace of mind to the Giver of all mercies. "O Michael! what need we care for poverty — nay, poor can we never be, although all our worldly substance may have melted like the snow. For Abel we must forever weep, and also for our father; but, Michael, my Michael, yield not to your despair; he will escape — he will escape — fear it not; and when we hear and know that he is safe, happier shall we all be than ever; although that, indeed, is impossible, for, since I was your wife, too happy have I been for any one in this mortal world."

It was fortunate that Adam Forester had gone, this sunny forenoon, to Roslin, and thus escaped hearing this intelligence, which, no doubt, the stranger would have communicated to him had he been at home. In a wonderfully short time, Michael recovered first from the fever, and then from the stupor of that great grief. Agnes had had no arts of allurements or fascination when she was a maiden; but, in her unreserved simplicity, had she given him her affection. Nor since her marriage had she ever sought to sway his mind, either in trifling or serious concerns, but by the truth and purity of disinterested love, which had no other object in this life but to make him happy. Now, she had made use not of many words, nor yet of very many tears; but those that were said and shed had done their office, and her husband was perfectly composed in this most severe affliction. As he looked on her calm, still beautiful face, almost smiling, and which, had it not been for the thoughts of Abel, would most assuredly have smiled, with its usual untroubled sweetness, on the prospect of poverty or even want, he could not but feel the utter worthlessness of all other possessions; while the hopeful light of her eyes beaming fondly upon him, forced him to believe that his brother would escape, and that the worst evil he had feared need no more haunt his imagination.

Each tear as it fell at times down her cheek upon his — each almost repressed sigh — each whisper of comfort when no word was syllabled — and each consoling sentence of wisest words, when her emotion permitted utterance to her calm voice — restored him more and more nearly to his usual tranquillity. A sort of haze hung over the evil that had befallen — its most hideous features were hidden — and all those cheering thoughts arose, which, whencesoever they came, and by whomsoever inspired, are, in times of distress, the sure reward of a virtuous and pious life.

Aunt Isobel now came bustling, with her usual mirth and vivacity into the room, but instantly changed her mood and her manner when her eyes met those of Agnes. For the first time in her life had she now seen in these eyes something like an expression of misery, which was not diminished by the faint smile that reluctantly passed over their tears. Could it be, she thought, that Michael had been unkind? — and she turned towards him an almost upbraiding look. But Michael kissed the brow of Agnes, and, putting her hand into that of her guardian — for that was still her deserved name — he earnestly desired the old lady not to be disturbed while he told her of a very great and melancholy misfortune, the details of which he had not yet communicated fully even to his wife.

“The stranger who left the house about an hour ago is a respectable person in trade in Edinburgh; and my unhappy brother, poor Abel, instigated, no doubt, and assisted by that villain Mansel, has forged upon him to a very large amount. Abel has got the money; and unless I repay it, Mr. Maxwell will do all he can to discover, apprehend, and bring my brother to punishment; that is, to death — yes, to certain irretrievable death. If I make good the loss he has sustained, he will suffer the affair to rest; Abel will escape this time at least; and we may yet rescue him from destruction.” The good old lady sighed deeply, and wiped her eyes, but said not a word, and motioned him to proceed. “At my father’s death, which God remove to a distant day, you know

this property is mine, burthened with a considerable mortgage, and a small annuity to Abel. We have some outstanding debts due to us; and you know the amount of the fortune my beloved Agnes brought me: all together, would no more than repay what Mr. Maxwell has lost by my infatuated brother's crime."—"Hush! hush!" said Agnes; "I think I hear my father's footsteps!" They listened; but it had only been the motion of some bird among the withered leaves. "Yes, my dear Agnes, I feel the meaning of your fears—to know all that we know would break the old man's heart. I did not think it necessary to consult you what ought to be done; so, trusting to your approval, I told Mr. Maxwell that I would make good what he had lost to the last shilling I possessed, or would possess for years to come. But I told him that it would certainly kill my father to be told of Abel's crime; so I have become his debtor to the whole amount he desired; and while I continue to pay him the interest, he will not demand the principal till my father's death. Then Dovenest must be sold; and we must seek out, in our poverty, for another habitation."

Michael rose from his seat at the close of these words, and paced hurriedly up and down the room. "Alas! Mrs. Irvine, you will think now—it will be impossible for you not to think it—that Agnes Hay has made an unhappy marriage, and that you brought her up so tenderly and so wisely, to become miserable at last. And yet, if I could die for my Agnes—if, for her sake, I could pour out from my heart every drop it contains—if I could purchase her peace through life by the mutilation of my limbs and miserable decease in a lazar house"—"O Michael! my husband, what is this I hear? Did you not promise, even now, when you pressed me, as you said, with pride to your bosom, to think nothing of this evil, which, since Abel is to be spared, is no evil at all? No! Michael—it is a blessing—a blessing from that Being who has been most merciful to us all our days—who guarded my orphan head by day and night, and has given me the gift of an humble and contented spirit." And so saying, the beautiful young wife knelt

down, and folded her hands beneath her bosom, over the babe that stirred within her, and gave her a foretaste of a mother's joy. "Disturb her not, disturb her not," said her guardian, with sobs that might not be controlled. "Not I — not I was it that taught my Agnes — her virtues are from God, and from God came the lore that putteth to shame all worldly wisdom, and maketh her alike fit for the trials of earth, or the reward of heaven."

It was no sudden and transient fit of enthusiasm, but the calm deep movement of piety, that kept Agnes in the attitude of prayer. To the meaning of her words, high as it was, her nature was to be for ever true. No exultation felt she in her submissiveness; it was the strong humility of a perfectly resigned heart. The fair sight breathed a corresponding calm over those who in themselves had not perhaps been so comforted; and, on rising from her knees, she was rewarded by the peace on her husband's face, and the kind eyes of her guardian, that looked on her with a Sabbath smile. And now the old man's footsteps were evidently heard: every cheek was dried, and every voice composed to cheerfulness, when their father entered the room. He put his staff in the usual corner, and said with animation — "Children, I have had a sharp walk, and it is a fine black frost — let us to our meal — for an east wind gives a good appetite, and I think that I may yet live to see another Christmas."

The small round table was now covered with its white cloth, and placed near a blazing root fire. Agnes, with even more than her usual tenderness, wheeled the old high backed arm-chair into its place. The old man held up his withered hand, and bowed down his hoary head in a thanksgiving over the frugal repast; and, forgetting, or hushing within their hearts, all painful thoughts, the family broke their bread in peace, and there were even smiles sent round the board, which, in spite of that sore distress, was blessed of heaven.

CHAPTER V.

A snow storm had been blowing throughout the day from all points of the compass, and huge drifts blocked up almost the roads and paths leading into the valley of the Esk. The family of Dovenest were sitting, somewhat late on a January night, round a blazing fire; nor did the secret, which their hearts had kept from the old man, painful as it was to think upon, prevent them from enjoying much happiness. Indeed, by their constant care to look cheerful at all times in his presence, they had often made themselves really so, when, if left to themselves, they could not but have been oppressed with anxiety and grief. Adam Forester had that night spoken frequently of Abel, and lamented that they did not know where he was; for, said he, "I wished to have sent him a new year's gift; which he, no doubt, must be sorely in need of. The poor boy has not, I fear, such a comfortable house as we have over his head this wild night — not such a fire as ours to sit by — no — no. Why did he ever leave his father's house?" Soon after these words, the old man fell asleep in his chair, and nothing more was said by anybody to disturb his slumber. Michael took his book; Agnes sat before him at her work, of a kind most affecting to the heart of a young wife; and Aunt Isobel, whom nobody ever saw idle, was moving about the room with noiseless steps, and getting ready the evening meal by the time the old man should awake, which he was sure to do when the clock gave warning before the hour of eight. Early hours, night and morning, were kept at Dovenest, with some variation, both in winter and summer; and from November till the end of March, nine was the hour of evening prayer.

A loud blow struck the door; and then a man dressed in red, like an officer of justice, burst into the room. He looked round, for a few seconds, with a stern smile, and then said — "Ay, ay; you have put Master Abel to

bed, I trow ; but the bird is not flown — he is in the cage ; so, good folks, without more ado, let him be produced. I must do my duty.” And he laid down a pair of handcuffs on the table.

Adam, roused from his sleep by that horrid intrusion, kept his eyes fixed in a ghastly stare upon the pitiless wretch, while his withered cheeks were white as ashes.

“Giles Mansell has forged on the Bank of Scotland ; and his crony, Abel Forester, your son, old man, is implicated. The brass plates were found in the garret he inhabited, not long since ; but no need of palaver ; hanging is but hanging, so bring him out, or I must have a search in the rookery.”

The old man now knew that Abel was a forger, and saw him on the scaffold. He gave no sigh, no groan, no shudder ; but, as if a bar of iron had struck him on the temple, or vapor damp suffocated him, his head fell back, and his features grew rigid, as in the grasp of death. Isobel saw the change, and soon bathed his forehead. But Michael questioned the officer, who, unmoved, without circumlocution, and in a few plain and dreadful words repeated the frightful truth.

The miserable father seemed to hear in his swoon ; and, raising himself up in his chair, which he was too weak to leave, fastened his eyes once more, as in fascination, upon a serpent. “Abel has done many things sore amiss, Mr. M’Intyre — for I know your name, sir — but he is no forger ;” and the very sound of that fatal word struck on his heart like a knell, while, with his eyes still fixed in dreadful doubt on the officer’s dark scowling countenance, and, with a forced smile of hope that passed away over his quivering lips and cheeks, he laid back his white head once more, and uttered one long, dismal, deadly groan of incurable despair.

M’Intyre searched thoroughly the whole house, and then appeared to believe that he had come thither on wrong information. He sat down, laid his loaded pistols on the table, and helped himself to food. Meanwhile, Michael had taken his father in his arms, and, carrying him into his own room, laid him on his bed. He tried

to comfort him in his agony ; but his father, although he looked on him, did not seem to hear or to understand his words. Agnes came and sat down at the bedside, holding the old man's head between her hands, and Michael returned to the room he had left. M'Intyre was eating greedily, and demanded liquor, which was given. There the fiend sat, with his shaggy eyebrows, coarse features, and sallow complexion, dead to all human misery. The thief-taker had once been a soldier, and had seen much of honorable and dishonorable death. For twenty years — for the wretch's coarse hair was grizzled — it had been his business to prowl about prisons — to lock cells upon guilt and despair — to sit cold as ice beside quaking caitiffs at the bar — and to do hideous work about scaffolds on days of execution. Even he had an idea of duty — inexorable with a warrant — and not to be bribed by the criminal on whom he had set his fangs — gruff and grim in his integrity, that was proof against the silver and gold of those who had been driven to wickedness by want and famine.

“ Nae doubt it is hard on your father, sir ; but, in time, he'll get ower it like mysel. It's nae secret — a' Scotland kens it — how my ain son, Donald Dhu, rubbed shouthers with the gallows. He had gotten up to be sergeant in the Forty-second — the Auld Black Watch — but a halbert wouldna content my gentleman—he wad fain be an ensign ; so he forges a bill for four hunder poun'. But his hawse wasna made for hemp : aff gaed Donald across the seas, and was shot through the heart by a black nigger in the West Indies. Anither stoup o' whisky, sir, gin ye please. It's a bitter night—eneuch to tirr a taed ; and I hae been up to the oxters in snaw-pits fifty times, between this and Loanhead.”

Michael, who had had time to reflect on the charge against Abel, began to recover his spirits, and to believe that this might be a mistake : at all events, he had no reason to think that his brother was now in Scotland ; and, in this belief, he could bear more patiently the presence of the loquacious man of blood. “ Weel, weel, man, I'm no sorry that this ne'er-do-weel brither o' yours

is no here the nicht. But dinna think that he'll no be gruppit duing this verra moon. 'Think ye he'll escape a' the thief-takers between the Land's End and John o' Groat's? . We're a strong squad. And then there's no a clachan, nor a town, nor a road side change-house, that hasna a hue and cry description o' him by this time — liker than ony painted picture. There they are stuck up on every smiddy door — every cross stane — every gable end — every kirk yett. A fox may as weel think o' rinnin i' the day time through amang houses, and alang the king's high road, without being worried by a thousand curs. The hue and cry will gang down into the very coal pits; and the chimley soopers will ken him war he to tak a brush owre his shouther, and blacken his face like the deil himsel. But here's to you, sir. This is prime spirit. I'se warrant it's smuggled."

Finding that Michael did not join in the conversation, the officer lighted his pipe, and sat mute and surly, with his huge hand close upon his pistols, till the clock struck twelve, when, with an oath, he started to his feet, and, growling out that he must be at the jail by two o'clock, pocketed his weapons, and faced the storm, still raging furiously, in the starless night. Michael listened at the door, and heard him plunging through the wreathes away down the glen.

Michael's heart, in some degree, revived on the removal of that loathsome reptile, or beast of prey; and just as he was about to go into his father's room, the old man, supported by Agnes and Isobel, came feebly forwards, and requested to be placed in his chair. "O Abel, Abel! why hast thou done this thing? And is there, indeed, no pity for thee among thy fellow creatures? No; they know not how to pardon each other's sins. But we have not had family worship yet; and it must be done before I take to my bed; for from that bed shall I never be lifted again, till you, Michael, walk at my feet, and lay your father in the only place of rest on this cruel earth." But Michael was not able to read the chapter; so Agnes, stronger than them all in this trial, took the Bible, and read what her father had marked some hours before, with

a voice that faltered less and less at every verse, and, at the close, was almost steady as it had been in the morning worship.

A pane in the window that moved on a hinge was stirred, and a well-known whisper said — “ Brother — brother ! ” The old feeble man started like a youth to his feet at the sound of Abel’s voice. The door was unlocked ; and there in the midst of them, all drenched with sleet and snow, stood the poor hunted felon. “ Kiss me — kiss me, Abel — for I am sick — sick at heart ; ” and the miserable man laid his icy cheek close to that of his father. Instinctively he supported him to his chair, and knelt down, leaning his head upon his father’s knees. “ Will not that fearful fiend return against us ? ” said the old man, looking wildly towards the door ; and Michael stood, in his giant strength, before his father and his brother, resolved that not a hair of Abel’s head should be touched till he himself was killed. But the officer had obeyed his instructions, and was now miles on his road to Edinburgh.

Abel had, for weeks, suffered more pain, hunger, and cold — more searching misery of mind and body — than had almost ever fallen to the lot of man ; and the relief now yielded, by the very light and heat of the hearth, was felt in his spirit through its frame. They who loved him so dearly would fain have spared him the agony of shame in telling the extent of his delinquencies : all that they desired was to hear from him if he had any hope, if there was any chance of escape. But his sin, his shame, his sufferings, were now all, for a time, forgotten ; for a cold flutter, he said, was tugging at his heart, and he fell down like a corpse upon the floor. His father, who, a few minutes before, was unable to walk across the room unassisted, now raised his son’s head with an arm of strength, and, along with Michael, bore him to that bed in which he had slept for so many tranquil and innocent years. Every other fear was lost in that of his immediate dissolution ; and the old man expressed his determination to sit by him during the whole night. The lights

were soon extinguished — all but one taper — and, at dead of midnight, there was silence, if not sleep, over all the house.

CHAPTER VI.

HAD Adam Forester been even a stern and austere father, instead of one most indulgent and forgiving, the pitiable condition of his son must have softened all judgment of his undutiful transgressions. His guilt had been great, but so had already been its punishment. He had found himself inextricably involved in many dishonest and dangerous practices by Mansell, whose sister he had privately married. That unprincipled person had urged him to the commission of all those acts which had made him amenable to the criminal law, and had indeed so practised upon his easy and credulous nature, as to lead his hand into guilt without even a clear knowledge in his mind that he was perpetrating any crime. Mansell — a man of education and ingenuity — had been an engraver, and had applied his knowledge of that art to the worst purposes. Abel had been made a convenient tool of by his abandoned brother-in-law, and at last found that he had brought himself close to the very edge of destruction. He scarcely knew the exact extent of his own guilt; but he knew that he had been proclaimed a felon, and that the officers of justice had, for some time, been in search of him on a capital charge. Mansell was somewhere hidden in the wild darkness of London; and Abel's wife was concealing herself in the north of England, till it might be possible for him to elude the keen blood-hounds that were hunting him out, and join her at an appointed place in those secluded regions.

Abel had, at last, been driven to such extremities in his endeavors to conceal himself, that for a week he had remained, day and night, in one of the old tombs of the Greyfriar's Church-yard. Now and then he had come

out, like a ghost, from that dreadful asylum, and purchased something to keep him alive. The weather had been intensely cold, and the poor criminal had been sometimes nearly frozen to death. But the love of life — that strong passion — had supported his heart in the very frostiest famine; and the agitation of an unceasing anxiety had made his blood to circulate, when otherwise it would have been congealed through his veins in that open vault, whose only door had sometimes been a drift of snow. In the squalor of his wretchedness, he had at last been afraid to go into any shop to purchase a loaf to devour in his gnawing hunger: eyes looked at him suspiciously, he thought, and people whispered to each other; so that, unable longer to endure that direful imprisonment, he had issued forth in spite of fear, and, in defiance of all emergencies, had found his way, in that snow storm, to the house of his father. Some one had, perhaps, known his countenance, and informed the police that he had been seen in the city; or Mr. M'Intyre's visit to Dovenest might have been one of those accidental coincidences, that often bring guilt to detection, and at all times hang over the workers of iniquity — making, on a sudden, the most safe and secret place dangerous as the lion's den.

His extreme suffering had so worn out both soul and body, that Abel, on his arrival at Dovenest, was at first almost insensible to every thing he saw or heard. His very remorse was lost in pain, sickness, and exhaustion; and while his old gray-headed father had embraced him once more, he scarcely knew that he was in the old man's arms. "Let me lie down, father, for I am dead with weariness, cold, hunger, and want of sleep." Adam Forrester's strength had seemed miraculously restored on sight of his son. On his shoulders, rather than on Michael's, had the prodigal leaned as he tottered to his bed; at that bed-side his father heard his hurried confession; nor would the old man go to his own rest till Agnes beseeched him with those soft dewy eyes, whose gracious power he could never oppose, and promised to call him up before daylight, with that low and plaintive voice

which had never yet asked and been refused, and never would so do until his dying day.

But long before daylight there was Adam Forester sitting by his Abel's bedside. With his own hands had he lighted a fire in the room, and was preparing some food for him when Agnes appeared. A few hours' warm sleep had much restored the miserable man; and, wholly possessed with the feeling of being once more at home — once more a dweller in Dovenest — Abel almost forgot that he was a hunted felon, and that in an hour he might be dragged from his bed and flung manacled into a dungeon. All the evil of these two last years, whether it were sin or sorrow, guilt or remorse, was banished from his memory — himself of that distracted time had perished away — and he was the innocent Abel of other days, when he had little more to upbraid himself with, but a few faults and follies, forgiven as soon as known, and never remembered against him beyond the first evening prayer. Then would he all at once remember what he was now; and as the horrible future appalled him, he wished that the past might be here peacefully expiated, and his head never more lifted up from that pillow.

Within the last few hours, some of the strongest of all human passions had, with severe force, struck the heart of old Adam Forester; and passions, too, opposite to each other as midday and midnight. These sudden shocks had, for the time, communicated, as it were, a preternatural strength to their victim. But when the final excitation subsided, it left him weak as a reed. He was sensible, before others observed it, that a palsy had crept over him — that his powers of speech were benumbed, and that this must be the finger of death. The change was soon visible to all but Abel; and Michael, Agnes, and Isobel, who had the most nice of all his looks, gestures, words, and motions, certainly knew that he was fatally stricken. There was no painful distortion to distress their hearts — his speech was not greatly changed; but a mortal weakness overspread face and figure, and there was an expression in his eyes that told the lids would in a few hours be closed. "I am dying,

children: let me have all your prayers." Abel had again fallen asleep, and heard not his father's voice.

There was no weeping or lamentation at that death-bed. As the tide of life kept ebbing away, the old man seemed anxious and more anxious about Abel. But his anxiety although heavier, seemed less painful, and to be nearly akin to hope and trust. They who surrounded him knew well what was meant by each faint single word; they also knew all he wished to hear; and as his dim eyes looked towards them, which of them he expected to speak. "If my Abel has wronged any one, sell this patrimony, Michael, and purchase him life."

Michael had kept one secret from his father; for he knew that, independently of other considerations, old men cannot bear, without severe pain, the thoughts of the property their industry has painfully purchased departing into a stranger's hands after their death; and Adam Forester was not altogether without this failing incident to old age. But now Michael saw that he could give him strong comfort. "Father, fear not for Abel's life. Of this last crime of his associate, he has said that he is wholly innocent; and however suspicious circumstances may be against him, they will all be explained, should he ever be brought to trial. The innocent will not suffer. Other wrong things has Abel done; but, some months ago, I settled the whole with his accuser; and even with this, my patrimony, have I already purchased safety to his life. Not a hair of Abel's head shall be hurt, father — no, not a hair of his head." — "Then can I die happy," said the old man; and these were his last words. Agnes leaned down her cheek close to his, and was about to smooth his pillow; but she heard no breath, and said calmly to Michael — "Our father is dead."

CHAPTER VII.

IN a few weeks it was known throughout the neighborhood that both Dovenest and Sprinkeld were to be sold. Some people, who pretended to be in the secret, said, that Michael's young wife longed for a town life, and had given him no peace until he had agreed to remove into Edinburgh. Others looked grave, and shook their heads, saying, they had never thought Adam Forester a rich man : that heavy mortgages were on his small property ; and that, no doubt, Abel had cost his fond and foolish father much money — the old man having, very reprehensibly, encouraged him in all his extravagance. None knew the real state of the case ; although, in a short time, Michael let it be generally understood, that he was able, indeed, to pay all his debts ; but, after that was done, that he should be but a poor man. Coarse and idle rumors died away in less than one little month ; and it was felt by every fireside in the glen, that, when the Foresters left it, it would lose the best family it had contained within the oldest memory. There was no pity felt for them, for they all seemed composed and cheerful shortly after the funeral. Indeed, there are persons—and the Foresters were of that number—who, even in severest trials, are objects of a higher feeling than pity, and appear, in the elevation of misfortune, worthier our envy than our compassion. Towards them, all impertinent curiosity is at once quelled by the simple dignity of their demeanor : their condition, whatever it may be, must not be questioned ; and, although we remain ignorant of their real circumstances, we take the propriety of all their conduct on trust, and follow them in all their unrepining changes with our silent and approving sympathy.

Nor was there now any unhappiness very hard to be endured within the walls of Dovenest. Abel had remained in his concealment, till he thought he might venture to attempt his nightly escape over the hill country into the north of England. His case was desperate ;

and after many contrite and remorseful confessions, and receiving his brother's entire forgiveness, he went his way, promising to let them hear something of him, if he eluded detection, as soon as prudence would permit. The silence of all rumors concerning him was the best comfort that could be offered to all their hearts; and they were willing to cherish the belief that he had effected his escape beyond seas. That belief was enough. What although they were about to be what is called poor? By that poverty they had probably purchased Abel's life, at a time when it was forfeited, and he himself might have been seized. And what peace could there ever have been at Dovenest again, if, for its sake, Abel had been destroyed? Yet, although soon to leave that beloved place, they did not seek violently to dis sever from it their strong affections. They would enjoy it to the last; every day they had yet to remain within its quiet bounds, they filled up, from morning to night, with endearing thoughts of its beauty — every little nook was visited and revisited with an unstrained pleasure, gently mingled with an unpainful regret — every tree that hung its shadow over the hawthorn hedge, upon their own river, they regarded more fondly now that their last spring was adorning its familiar branches; and as they stood beside the dial, they prayed that the hours might throw over it their lingering shadows, that the day of their departure, though fixed, might be as remote as possible; and their last two months extended, in the multitude of their thoughts within them, into the length of a mournful but not unhappy year. To Michael, the prospect of leaving forever the house in which he had been born, was, perhaps, less disturbing at any time, than it was to Agnes, to know that the scene of her bridal happiness was soon to pass away from her like a dream. Seeing them perfectly resigned, Aunt Isobel lost nothing of her habitual vivacity, and her constant cheerfulness often insinuated itself by an agreeable contagion into their spirits, when, perhaps, they were disposed to despond, and might have yielded to the pressure of natural disappointment and distress. And, ere long, there was a new inmate within the peace-

ful dwelling; for a child was born; and Michael and Agnes being now parents, not one single shadow of sorrow could abide round its cradle. Agnes felt it at her bosom — Michael saw its mother smile — and all mere worldly prosperity was, under the power of that sacred instinct, utterly forgotten. Richer were they than tongue could tell, or heart could conceive; and the Sabbath day on which the infant Lucy was baptized, was the most serenely and perfectly blest day of all their lives, scarcely excepting that on which they had been married.

Michael Forester had fixed upon a plan of life, and had already prepared to carry it into execution. The only master he had ever known was his own father, and that had been always a pleasant servitude. Independent he would still be; and, in so resolving, he felt that he was influenced by an allowable, an honorable pride. A strong man, in the meridian of life, well educated, and not unconscious of his abilities, what had he to fear either for himself or those he loved? Nay, a new spring of happiness seemed to be flowing within his heart, now that a demand was made for exertions that, but for this misfortune, would have been unnecessary, and he looked with a steady and bold eye into futurity. His life at Dovenest, industrious as it had been, almost appeared to him now, in the elation of his hopeful mind, to have been a life of indolence. "I will build another house — I will cultivate other fields — I will become a sitter in another kirk — I will form other connections — not to the forgetfulness of any one thing, place, or person now dear to me; no — no — never shall they cease from my grateful remembrance; but to all those I will add other enjoyments; and my Agnes, if so it pleaseth heaven, my beautiful Agnes shall be yet happier than ever."

There was a pastoral farm in the parish of Holylee, called Bracken Braes, which had been attached to one still larger several years ago, but which was again to be let by itself, owing to the mismanagement and failure of the tenant. The dwelling-house had been suffered to go almost entirely into decay; but the agent of the rich proprietor, to whom a large district of the country belonged,

at once offered to repair or rebuild it ; and Michael, having easily found sureties, took the farm. Aunt Isobel, out of her jointure as a minister's widow, had, during upwards of thirty years, saved three hundred pounds ; and Michael knew what was his duty too well to refuse employing that sum in the way that was best for the happiness of the household. The cheerful old lady laughed on confessing her unknown riches ; but tears of thankfulness were, at the same time, in her eyes, when she knew what a blessing was now in her little store. So, while Agnes was happy with her infant, Lucy, at Dovenest, Michael frequently visited Bracken Braes, which was to be ready for them on the 25th of May, when there would be a joyful flitting ; ay, joyful, even although it was to be from Dovenest : although that gate which he had so often unlatched was to be closed behind him for the rest of his life.

The house of Bracken Braes, at the end of February, was in ruins. The messy stone wall, round what had once been a garden, was, in many places, fallen down ; and, here and there, the wild sweetbriars seemed to hold it together by their roots and tendrils. In that defaced garden nothing was to be seen but a few gooseberry bushes in their old age, almost as tall and wide as lilacs. A sheltered bourtree, and a mountain ash, dwarfed by the browsing cattle, stood at one gable end which was yet entire, and a noble plane, overshadowed the deserted domicile. The hill side behind, from which the place took its name, was sprinkled with brackens, interspersed with a few hazels ; while, here and there, a holly, with its burnished green, brightened the pasture. The other low hills, near at hand, were smooth and bare ; but, in the distance, was a range of heathery mountains. Several streams, or rather runlets, rose imperceptibly round about ; in drougthy weather, no doubt, dried up, but now, with the melted snow, clear as diamonds ; while a well, even still clearer, and never known to have been dry, green with water cresses, and resplendent with various vegetable lustre, had lain there, for a good many years,

undisturbed by bowl or pitcher, and stirred only by the shaggy hill ponies, or sportsman lying down to quench his thirst, when in pursuit of the solitary plover.

Poets are fond of building fairy cottages in an oasis in the desert, or perhaps beneath the lake waves, or in groves of air at the rising or setting of golden suns; but here, all transformation, sudden and beautiful as it was, was the work of homely human skill, laboring on the homeliest materials. A small quarry of blue slate stone, unworked since from it had been built the parish kirk, nearly a century ago, was cleared of brackens, briars, and foxgloves, to the disturbance of nothing but the little shy wren and the old gray hare; and, in a week, the sledges had laid down beside the ruined walls wherewithal to rebuild up anew their ancient proportions. Michael's own hands dug the foundations, and shaped them into lines even of picturesque beauty — obeying only the character of the ground, and its small jutting angles. The merry masons soon ran up the walls. Several oaks that had been dug up from a neighboring moss, almost as fresh as when they had sunk in it, furnished the lintels and the humble roof tree; a few carts of wheat straw from the sunny and fertile fields of Stowe were enough to form a thick regular thatch roof, impervious to the thawing snows, or the deluging hill rains; the trowels covered the low front and gable ends with a cheerful gleam of whiteness that perhaps the painter might have condemned, but which was to smile on the narrow glen with perpetual sunshine; and there was the homestead of Bracken Braes seen, from foundation stone to chimney top, before the second moon had entirely withdrawn her midnight light from the glittering stream of Heriot Water.

The sun, on the 25th of May, rose with so joyful a lustre upon Dovenest, that all its inmates felt it would be worse than vain to be very sorrowful; but, even before that joyful lustre had glinted upon the woods of Dryden, Hawthornden, and Roslin, all its inmates had been moving about in the gray and uncertain dawn. They had not been forced to sell their furniture, nor to undergo the

mean miseries of a sale. It was soon despatched towards Bracken Braes. Their last meal was taken in Dovenest; and, if some tears were shed as they were going down the glen, all eyes were nearly clear before they reached Lasswade. It was rather like a party of pleasure seeking a rural holiday than a family leaving an old home.

"Ay, yonder is our new dwelling-place!" exclaimed Aunt Isobel, as, during one of the cool hours before evening, the little cavalcade turned round a green mound that had hidden Bracken Braes. "Look yonder, my jewel; will not your cradle rock pleasantly yonder like a bit nest on the shady bough?" and she raised up the baby in her arms, that certainly smiled an answer to her cheerful nurse. In a few minutes Michael took Agnes in his arms, and welcomed her with a kiss to their new habitation; and there she stood more beautiful and beloved than even on that afternoon when they first told to each other their pure affection. To Agnes the scene around her was far more than enchantment. Her husband had spoken of the place in measured praise, fearing it might not please after Dovenest. But it was so different from that spot, in its simple pastoral beauty, that Agnes loved it at once, without any comparisons, for its own sake. In silent joy she walked with her husband — Aunt Isobel behind them, cherishing and singing to the infant — up the avenue that winded round a knoll to the front of the cottage. There, on each side of the sloping banks, were the very self-same rose trees that had flourished so richly at Dovenest — many of the very self-same flowers — and a few shrubs that had been especial favorites. "'They are taking kindly to the soil already,'" said Michael. "But here — here," cried Aunt Isobel, "here is the prettiest flower of them all — my own little Lucy Forester, the primrose of Bracken Braes!"

For a couple of hours Aunt Isobel was quite in her element, arranging every thing within doors and without — insisting, all the time, that Agnes should not fatigue herself, but remain with her Lucy on the seat beneath the plane tree. The parlor was soon furnished, if not with the same orderly neatness which it received next

day, very passably at least, considering all the hurry and confusion; and it was needful it should be so, for a party of visitors were already at the gate.

The clergyman of the parish, and his sober-suited sister, Mr. and Miss Kennedy, and with them several of the most respectable neighbors, (among others, Peter Tait, the formal and pragmatical schoolmaster,) had come, by Michael's appointment, to give a welcome to their new parishioners at Bracken Braes. Agnes and Aunt Isobel, each in her own pleasant way, received their unexpected guests, who had not come unprovided; and a tea party was soon laughing and talking in the parlor. By and by, the twilight softly darkened their faces, and the night hawk was heard without, whirring at intervals his monotonous song, now close at hand, and now from the other side of the glen. The kind visitors, with a warmth like that of ancient friendship, said farewell beneath the still shadow of the plane; and the family, in another hour, had all thankfully gone to rest in their new dwelling.



CHAPTER VIII.

Six quiet and laborious years, every week and month of which had, no doubt, contained its own little interesting incidents, had brought the farm of Bracken Braes to the perfection of pastoral beauty. Many a cold marsh, with its long unprofitable rushes, had been converted into the hard firm sod, on which the sheep lay with their lambs on the daisied herbage: Unseen turf fences went winding along the foot of every eminence, and even round and round the lower hills, subdividing the whole farm into picturesque enclosures. Small spots of rye and barley were visible among the heather; the turnip field shewed its richer verdure beside the stony slope of the uplands; and, down in the haughs, on the water side, bloomed the

white and purple clover, protected, by thick thorn hedges, from the cattle browsing on the old lea adjacent to the homestead. That homestead looked now almost like a building of other years: the thatch had received its weather stains — the most beautiful of coloring; but little of the walls below the eaves could be discerned through the roses, that clustered more thickly round the large vine-like leaves of the Virgin's Bower; the very shrubberies now cast their shadows; and the old plane tree itself, that seemed to have reached its growth a quarter of a century before, had extended its branches beyond the roof, and darkened the parlor twilight. Every bare nook about the place was now overgrown; every mark of the labor that had created cottage, garden, and avenue, was hidden; all the little stone walls were covered with moss and wild creepers; the lanes leading away to neighbors' house, sheep fold, shealing, or peat moss, were adorned with furze and hawthorns; and the character of the whole small territory was that of completed cultivation, denoting comfort and independence.

Not only had Michael Forester prospered in his worldly circumstances, and gained the esteem of the whole parish, but, during these six years, there had never been an hour of much anxiety at his fireside. Agnes Hay — for he always called his wife by her own sweet name — had been to him all that he desired. Agnes certainly was not what could be called a very active or ruling housewife; for gentleness and serenity were the prevailing qualities of her disposition, and she allowed the stream of life quietly to murmur by in her contentment. There was no waste — no extravagance — no carelessness under her mild domestic dominion; but her arrangements were all noiseless in their regularity, and proceeded in the spirit of peace. If there was any one thing in which she ever upbraided herself for being too expensive, it was in the article of dress. But her husband, although a plain and almost austere man in all his habits, thought Agnes Hay the most beautiful being on earth, and in that beauty he placed all his pride. It needed not many ornaments,

but it could bear some, without any diminution of its matronly and maidenlike simplicity. Michael himself worked at every sort of labor, and in all weather; but there was no need for Agnes to perform any other tasks, but such as suited her somewhat delicate health; and when he came home from the hill, and found her sitting at her needle, dressed as he desired, and with Lucy at her work too beside her knee, he felt his whole nature not only supported, but purified by the cheerful presence of so much beauty, innocence, and affection. At evening he saw those for whom he had been toiling during the day; and a feeling far profounder than pride or admiration was constantly in his heart whenever he left or entered the humble porch. An undisturbed quiet was for ever in his house, broken only by the sharp shrill voice of Aunt Isobel, who liked to speak in an upper key, or by her footsteps still quick as those of girlhood, and, sweetest of all sounds, by the prattle and the singing of his Lucy, in features the very image of her mother, but the most gleesome of children, and wild as the fawn in the wood. Yet, in the midst of all her mirth, Lucy would fall hush in a moment at her mother's voice, and all the smiles nearly disappear in the composed cheerfulness of her eyes and forehead. Then those golden clusters lay still upon her fair temples. The child, at the bidding of her mother's eye, would take up her book — perhaps the Bible — and read; or in employment equally religious, with her little hands would set the house in order against her father's return, and arrange upon the table his frugal meal. Whether the lark or the linnet sung or were mute in the open air, within there was at all times a music that never was heard with weariness, and in the darkest of days there was thus a sunbeam in the house.

Lucy was only six years old, but bold as a fairy — she had gone by herself a thousand times about the braes, and often upon errands to houses two or three miles distant. What had her parents to fear? The footpaths were all firm, and led through no places of danger, nor are infants of themselves incautious when alone in their

pastimes. Lucy went singing into the coppice woods, and singing she reappeared on the open hill side. With her small white hand on the rail, she glided along the wooden bridge, or, lightly as the ouzel, tripped from stone to stone across the shallow streamlet. The creature would be away for hours, and no fears felt on her account by any one at home — whether she had gone with her basket under her arm to borrow some articles of household use from a neighbor, or merely for her own solitary delight, wandered off to the braes to play among the flowers, coming back laden with wreaths and garlands. With a bonnet of her own sewing to shade her pretty face from the sun, and across her shoulders a plaid, in which she could sit dry during an hour of the heaviest rain beneath the smallest beild, Lucy passed many long hours in the daylight, and thus knew, without thinking of it, all the topography of that pastoral solitude, and even something of the changeful appearances in the air and sky.

The happy child had been invited to pass a whole day, from morning to night, at Ladyside, (a farm house about two miles off,) with her playmates, the Maynes, and she left home about an hour after sunrise. She was dressed for a holiday; and father, and mother, and Aunt Isobel, all three kissed her sparkling face before she set off by herself, and stood listening to her singing, till her small voice was lost in the murmur of the rivulet. During her absence, the house was silent, but happy; and the evening being now far advanced, Lucy was expected home every minute; and Michael, Agnes, and Isobel, went to meet her on the way. They walked on and on, wondering a little, but in no degree alarmed, till they reached Ladyside, and heard the cheerful din of the imps within still rioting at the close of the holiday. Jacob Mayne came to the door; but on their kindly asking why Lucy had not been sent home before daylight was over, he looked painfully surprised, and said that she had not been at Ladyside.

Agnes suddenly sat down, without speaking one word, on the stone seat beside the door, and Michael, support-

ing her, said — “ Jacob, our child left us this morning at six o’clock, and it is now near ten at night. God is merciful; but, perhaps, Lucy is dead.” Jacob Mayne was an ordinary, commonplace, and rather ignorant man; but his heart leapt within him at these words, and by this time his own children were standing about the door. “ Yes, Mr. Forester, God is merciful; and your daughter, let us trust, is not dead. Let us trust that she yet liveth; and, without delay, let us go to seek the child.” Michael trembled from head to foot, and his voice was gone; he lifted up his eyes to heaven, but it seemed not as if he saw either the moon or the stars. “ Run over to Raeshaw, some of you,” said Jacob, “ and tell what has happened. Do you, Isaac, my good boy, cross over to a’ the towns on the Inverleithen side, and, O Mr. Forester, Mr. Forester! dinna let this trial owrecome you sae sairly;” for Michael was leaning against the wall of the house, and the strong man was helpless as a child. “ Keep up your heart, my dearest son,” said Isobel, with a voice all unlike her usual; “ keep up your heart, for the blessed bairn is, beyond doubt, somewhere in the keeping of the great God — yea, without a hair of her head being hurt. A hundred things may have happened her, and death not among the number. Oh! no — no — surely not death — that would indeed be too dreadful a judgment!” and Aunt Isobel, oppressed by the power of that word, now needed the very comfort that she had in vain tried to bestow.

Within two hours a hundred people were traversing the hills in all directions, even to a distance which it seemed most unlikely that poor Lucy could have reached. The shepherds and their dogs, all night through, searched every nook — every stony and rocky place — every little shaw — every piece of taller heather — every crevice that could conceal anything alive or dead; but no Lucy was there. Her mother, who for a while seemed inspired with supernatural strength, had joined in the search, and, with a quaking heart, looked into every brake, or stopped and listened to shout and hollo reverberating among the hills, if she could seize on some tone of recognition or

discovery. But the moon sank ; and then all the stars, whose increased brightness had for a short time supplied her place, all faded away, and then came the gray dawn of morning, and then the clear brightness of day, and still Michael and Agnes were childless. "She has sunk into some mossy or miry place," said Michael, to a man near him, into whose face he never looked. "A cruel, cruel death for one like her ; the earth on which my child walked has closed over her, and we shall never see her more !"

At last a man, who had left the search and gone in a directions towards the high road, came running, with something in his arms, towards the place where Michael and others were standing beside Agnes, who lay apparently exhausted almost to dying on the sward. He approached hesitatingly ; and Michael saw that he carried Lucy's bonnet, clothes, and plaid. It was impossible not to see some spots of blood upon the frill that the child had worn round her neck. "Murdered — murdered," was the one word whispered or ejaculated all around ; but Agnes heard it not ; for, worn out by that long night of hope and despair, she had fallen asleep, and was perhaps seeking her lost Lucy in her dreams.

Isobel took the clothes, and, narrowly inspecting them with eye and hand, said, with a fervent voice, that was heard even in Michael's despair — "No ; Lucy is yet among the living. There are no marks of violence on the garments of the innocent — no murderer's hand has been here. These blood spots have been put there to deceive. Besides, would not the murderer have carried off these things ? For what else would he have murdered her ? But, O foolish despair ! what speak I of ? For wicked as this world is — ay, desperately wicked — there is not, on all the surface of the wide earth, a hand that would murder our child ! Is it not plain as that sun in heaven that Lucy has been stolen by some wretched gypsy beggar, and that, before that sun has set, she will be saying her prayers in her father's house, with all of us upon our knees beside her, or with our faces prostrate upon the floor ?"

Agnes opened her eyes and beheld Lucy's bonnet and plaid lying close beside her, and then a silent crowd. Her senses all at once returned to her, and she rose up — "Ay, sure enough, drowned — drowned — drowned; but where have you laid her? Let me see our Lucy, Michael; for in my sleep I have already seen her laid out for burial." The crowd quietly dispersed, and horse and foot began to scour the country. Some took the high-road, others all the by-paths, and many the trackless hills. Now that they were in some measure relieved from the horrible belief that the child was dead, the worst other calamity seemed nothing, for hope brought her back to their arms. Agnes had been able to walk to Bracken Braes; and Michael and Isobel sat by her bedside. Lucy's empty little crib was just as the child had left it the morning before, neatly made up with her own hands, and her small red Bible was lying on the pillow.

"O my husband! — this is being indeed kind to your Agnes; for much it must have cost you to stay here: but had you left me, my silly heart had ceased to beat altogether; for it will not lie still even now that I am well nigh resigned to the will of God." Michael put his hand on his wife's bosom, and he felt her heart beating as if it were a knell. Then, ever and anon, the tears came gushing, for all her strength was gone, and she lay at the mercy of the rustle of a leaf or a shadow across the window. And thus hour after hour past on till it was again twilight.

"I hear footsteps coming up the brae," said Agnes, who had for some time appeared to be slumbering; and, in a few moments, the voice of Jacob Mayne was heard at the outer door. It was no time for ceremony, and he advanced into the room where the family had been during all that trying and endless day. Jacob wore a solemn expression of countenance; and he seemed, from his looks, to bring them no comfort. Michael stood up between him and his wife, and looked into his heart. Something there seemed to be in his face that was not miserable. If he has heard nothing of my child, thought Michael, this man must care but little for his own fireside.

“O speak, speak!” said Agnes; “yet why need you speak? All this has been but a vain belief, and Lucy is in heaven.”—“Something like a trace of her has been discovered: a woman with a child, that did not look like a child of her’s, was last night at Clovenford, and left it by the dawning.”—“Do you hear that, my beloved Agnes?” said Isobel: “she’ll have tramped away with Lucy up into Ettrick or Yarrow; but hundreds of eyes will have been upon her, for these are quiet, but not solitary glens; and the hunt will be over long before she has crossed down upon Hawick. I knew that country in my young days. What say ye, Mr. Mayne? there’s the light of hope on your face.”—“There’s nae reason to doubt, ma’am, that it was Lucy. Every body is sure o’t. If it was my ain Rachel, I should hae nae fear o’ seeing her this blessed nicht.”

Jacob Mayne now took a chair, and sat down, with even a smile upon his countenance. “I may tell you, noo, that Watty Oliver kens it was your bairn, for he saw her limping after the limmer at Gala Brig; but haeing nae suspicion, he didna tak a second leuk o’ her; but ae leuk is sufficient, and he swears it was bonny Lucy Forester.” Aunt Isobel, by this time, had bread and cheese, and a bottle of her own elder-flower wine on the table. “You have had a long and hard journey, wherever you have been, Mr. Mayne; take some refreshment:” and Michael asked a blessing. Jacob saw that he might now venture to reveal the whole truth. “No, no, Mrs. Irvine, I am owre happy to eat or to drink. You are a’ prepared for the blessing that awaits you; your bairn is no far off; and I mysel’—for it was I mysel’ that found her—will bring her by the han’, and restore her to her parents” Agnes had raised herself up in her bed at these words, but she sunk gently back on her pillow; Aunt Isobel was rooted to her chair; and Michael, as he rose up, felt as if the ground were sinking under his feet.

There was a dead silence all round the house for a short space, and then the sound of many joyful voices, which again, by degrees, subsided. The eyes of all, then,

looked, and yet feared to look, towards the door. Jacob Mayne was not as good as his word, for he did not bring Lucy by the hand to restore her to her parents; but, dressed again in her own bonnet, and her own gown, and her own plaid, in rushed their child, by herself, with tears and sobs of joy; and her father laid her within her mother's bosom.

CHAPTER IX.

JACOB MAYNE had not, perhaps, either felt more or exerted himself more than his other neighbors on the occasion of Lucy's disappearance; but her parents continued to entertain towards him an especial gratitude. His was the first sympathy they had received, and he it was that rescued Lucy from that cruel gypsy. Henceforth they could never see him without emotion; and, as he was a worthy man, a lasting friendship was cemented between the families of Bracken Braes and Ladyside. Jacob, whose wife was living — a quiet homely woman — had one son, a boy of surprising abilities, now about ten years, and two daughters, only a year or two older than Lucy. They were her chief companions; but the girl that Lucy loved most, as she grew up, was Mary Morrison, of Ewebank, the only daughter of a widower. Ewebank was farther off than Ladyside, and, indeed, in another parish. Even that imaginary distinction helps to keep families apart more than distance; and, in this case, a range of hills that might almost be called mountains intervened; so that Lucy did not see Mary Morrison oftener than perhaps once a month, on an average, through the whole year. But there was something in the nature of these two young happy creatures, that, all unknown to themselves, knit their hearts to each other. Lucy thought there was no face among all her other friends nearly so delightful as the meek face of Mary

Morrison; and Mary, who was rather the elder of the two, sometimes contrived an excuse for a walk over to the Heriot Water, merely to see the joyful smiles of Lucy Forester. Mary lived in a very lonesome house, with a father who, no doubt, loved, but who was far from being gentle towards her; and the thought of the cheerful parlor of Bracken Braes often brought the tear to her eye, when she looked at the hill range that separated it from the dull solitude of Ewebank.

Jacob Mayne had a brother — a man of some property — who had lost his wife and only son many years ago. Jacob himself had had severe struggles with the world, and was now far from being prosperous. He could live, and clothe, and educate his children decently; but that was all. He had not been able to lay by a single shilling, and scarcely any new article of furniture had come into the house for a good many years. Perhaps he was somewhat soured in his temper by this continued poverty; and what occasionally still more depressed him, was the total cessation of all intercourse between himself and his brother, owing to one of those fatal quarrels which, beginning in the merest trifles, unintelligible to all persons but the parties themselves, eventually alienate affection, and leave those who in youth slept in the same bed, to travel down, angrily and apart, to the grave. Michael Forester had endeavored to reconcile them, but in vain; and he had even so offended Jacob Mayne by his interference, that, for a short time, their familiar friendship had been disturbed. The children, however, had always continued to play with each other, and, while that is the case, the parents wait an opportunity for reconciliation; while Agnes Hay, who had been a peace-maker, ever since she had come into the parish, had done so many delicate kindnesses to Jacob's wife, that, at last, one day at the kirk, Jacob came cordially up to the group, among whom Michael was standing during the ringing of the bell, and entered into conversation with him about the concerns of both their houses.

About two years after Lucy's adventure, there was a

deep sensation sent through every household, by the discovery of a sacrilegious crime perpetrated by a man who, up to the time of that wretched wickedness, had borne the highest character for probity and religion — no other than this wealthy brother of Jacob Mayne. The unhappy man was an elder; and had been observed, by a poor old woman, who had sat down, unobserved, to rest herself in a shade close to the church gate, to take money out of the poor's plate, and secrete it about his person. The pauper watched him several Sabbaths; and, at last, issued out of her concealment, and suddenly charged him with his guilt, to which she said she had frequently before been an eye-witness. In the tribulation of detected sacrilege, Richard Mayne had not a word to speak. The fierce old crone cried out against him till her voice was heard in the kirk; and, before a crowd of people who would all have disbelieved her as a maniac, the elder confessed his guilt, and demanded to be led to prison.

The very horror of the crime quelled, in all hearts, any desire of punishment. It shook the whole parish like an earthquake, and there was a disturbed silence in every house. Who might dare to say he could stand fast, when Richard Mayne had fallen under the temptation of Mammon, whom it now appeared he had served, and not the living God? Miserable man! what to him was money — the money of the poor? His wife and his son — they slept in the grave; and for himself, who was more abstemious than he — who more temperate — and who, until this hidden sacrilege, in all his dealings more rigidly just? And of what had Richard Mayne, the rich elder, during the unknown length of his crime, robbed the few paupers in the parish — that palsied widow and three other aged women, bedridden or tottering on crutches — the two cripples, one so afflicted from his youth, and the other crushed at his work by a falling stone — and him, that harmless creature, to whom reason had been denied? Perhaps, altogether, a few pounds, the loss of which had been felt in their salt and their meal, in their miserable daily dole, by the palsied, the blind, the lame, and the lunatic. Jacob Mayne, oppressed with shame, absented

himself, with all his family, from the kirk — shut himself up in his house, round which no figure was seen moving — and no one, for a time, went near the abode of the gray-headed worker of iniquity, nor knew whether he was alive or dead. Mr. Kennedy, the minister, had indeed gone to his house, and knocked at the door; but a low miserable voice told him to go away; and as he looked up, on his departure, to a window, he beheld the countenance of Richard Mayne, as if it were that of an evil spirit already undergoing its punishment. His only domestic had never returned to the house since that Sunday; nor had any smoke been seen since then from his chimney. Pity had not yet begun to work — at least not outwardly — in any human heart towards this great sinner. Even his brother yet stood aloof.

One night, after Isobel and Lucy had gone to rest, Agnes said — “O Michael! will you not go and see the wretched old man — if he be indeed in life? This misery must be more than he can bear.” The summer fire had been for some time dead on the hearth, but the bright moonlight filled the room, and the door was not yet latched. A shadow fell on the floor as Agnes was speaking, and Richard Mayne himself was in their presence. Long and rueful was the old man’s confession; and Michael now thought that he descried in him, what, before the crime, he had never noticed, although, no doubt, it had then existed — a manifest taint of insanity. In all his remorse — and it had worn him to the bone — his haggard eyes still gleamed when he spoke of the coins he had stolen from the poor; and betrayed, in a crafty and suspicious leer, the passion of the miser. The old man wept when Michael told him, great as had been his crime, to hope for mercy; but as he wept, he bitterly accused his brother of hard-hearted cruelty; and, with a tremulous voice, swore before his Maker that he would leave any thing he had past that family. “I have always received more kindness from you, Mr. Forester, than any other man in the parish, and I have made my will in your favor. Yes, I have made my will — I have indeed made my will — a good hundred pound to the poor — and the

rest, in money and bonds, to you, sir; for you often called in upon me, and were a moderate man in all your bargains. But I have not long to live; and to-morrow I will shew myself at market, and next Lord's day I will shew myself at church. God grant that she be not there who saw these withered hands robbing the widow and the fatherless; yet there she cannot be, for they tell me she is dead; and, O sir, does not her ghost come every midnight, and stand, pointing and laughing, with a palsied hand, with bleared eyes, on the old white-headed Judas Iscariot on his straw?"

Michael, in the morning, conducted back the unhappy old man to his own house, and got a person to take care of him for the short time he had to live. At church and market, however, Richard Mayne appeared. Few remained near him, even as if he had been an infectious lazar. His brother had, for the first time, that Sabbath attended Divine service; but he left the kirk with his family by a door at the other end from that where the excommunicated elder sat; and as he never even looked up, it is supposed he did not see the old man. In a few weeks Richard Mayne died, and Michael Forester gave orders about his funeral. His brother received an intimation of it, but did not attend. Nobody was asked to be present but the bearers; and Mr. Kennedy and Michael Forester let down the coffin, and said — "Dust to dust!"

It was soon known over all the parish that the unhappy man had left all his property to Mr. Forester. In a few days Jacob Mayne came over to Bracken Braes, and sat down with a face of angry determination. "I have been a poor man all my life, Mr. Forester; and, thank God, with a clear conscience and a well-behaved family, I can submit to poverty for the few years I have to live. Much good may my brother's money do you, Mr. Forester; but the love of money is said in Scripture to be the root of all evil, and it was so with my brother Richard. For ourselves, sir, we were all tolerably well off at Ladyside before you came among us; and we can live, although our families shall henceforth be strangers. You under-

stand me, Mr. Forester. As for you, Mrs. Forester, I have always respected you — ay, your face was always welcome in our house. But this injustice has struck deep, and I could curse the hour in which I was born." With these words, Jacob raised himself upon his staff, and said — "Here I shake the dust off my shoes — let us never more speak in this world."

Michael Forester had gone into his own room during Jacob's speech, and now returned with some parchments in his hand.

"Jacob, this is your poor brother's will;" and, so saying, he put it into the fire, which was burning briskly on a somewhat chill evening. "You are your brother's natural and only heir, my worthy friend; and the property he knew not how to use, (but you must think on him with the deepest pity, for he was not in his sound mind,) may it for many years prove a blessing to you all at Ladyside."



CHAPTER X.

WHAT a blessed change from a long lot of poverty, in which the wants and necessities of each day are with difficulty supplied, leaving to-morrow and all its uncertain demands unprovided for, and still lowering upon the anxious foresight, to such a competency of this world's goods as sets the hearts of parents free, at once and for ever, from all anxieties but those that must in every condition attend upon their children's conduct — their errors or their well-doing! It is a blessing felt over all our moral nature, to know that our board, however frugal, can be duly spread in security and peace; and that, should we be called away on a short warning, those whom we leave behind us will not fall away from comfort into any destitution. Domestic virtue is almost only another name for domestic peace; and, although assuredly many

bear extremest penury, not only without detriment to their character, but to its purification and increased vigor, yet, with people in general, extreme abasement of condition does mournfully abase the soul, and even our natural affections themselves pine and dwindle in that cold and cheerless atmosphere.

This truth was now gratefully felt by the family of the Maynes. Now that his mind was relieved from that trouble of anxiety about his wife and children, which had more or less disturbed him by day and night, almost from the year of his marriage, Jacob Mayne saw distinctly the duties he had either neglected altogether, or very imperfectly performed. He reflected, with surprise and sorrow, on his fretful and irritable temper, that had so often made the house unhappy — on his unreasonable demands on his wife and children, who, do what they would, never could please him — on causeless quarrels among those who yet loved one another — on many long evenings of silent dissatisfaction, more painful in retrospect than the angriest contentions — and, above all, on his unpardonable, his unchristian conduct to his brother, with whom he had cherished an inveterate dissension, and had suffered to lead that unbefriended and lonesome life that had finally preyed, as it would now seem, on his very reason, till, under the power of a diseased passion, he perpetrated a crime that was expiated on earth by death and infamy. To these, and many other such thoughts, his mind and his heart now gave a ready entrance; and he confessed, in sincere contrition, all his manifold errors to Michael Forester, whose noble character, in spite of all the best means and opportunities of knowledge, he had grievously misunderstood, and whom he had not hesitated to accuse to his face of hypocrisy and injustice.

But there was no reason why honest Jacob should not in due time forget his errors. His hard-working wife now wore a smiling face, that reminded him of what it was long ago, when he crossed the moors to visit her at her father's house. His girls could now show themselves at church or market with the very best in the parish, nor yet subject their parents to a charge of extravagance;

and, above all, his son Isaac, the pride of the country side, could now be sent to college, and become a scholar. Nor was Jacob, bad judge as he was of such matters, deceived in this; for his son was indeed a boy of surpassing genius — a boy of many thousand — born although he was of such very ordinary people, and without one single advantage — working in the fields, even at that tender age, during most of the hours that he could spare from the parish school. His vacations had been little else than a month's bodily toil; but nature had lavished upon him her choicest mental gifts; and, in his ample forehead and full clear eyes, there was apparent the expression of an extraordinary intellect. Michael Forester approved of the plan of sending him to college; and, accordingly, before he had perfected his twelfth year, Isaac Mayne, the pale-faced thoughtful scholar of Lady-side, left, for the first time, the farm house in which he was born, and, without friend or patron, entered with enthusiasm on his academical career.

On the death of Richard Mayne, Michael Forester was made an elder, and thus was brought more frequently into immediate intercourse with Mr. Kennedy. Michael had always been a respected guest at the manse; but he knew his own situation, and kept it. Mr. Kennedy was a man of literary habits, and had also, for some years, employed his leisure hours in educating the sons of several of the neighboring gentry. Michael never intruded himself upon his minister's retirement; but they often met, notwithstanding, and might be said to have been on a footing of friendship ever since Michael came to Bracken Braes. Nor are there any purer sweeteners of our mortal lot than those calm and tempered friendships that, while they scarcely seem to constitute any sensible portion of our life, do yet shed their perpetual influence over it all, keeping alive, within hearts that feel each other's worth, all the best human affections, unimpaired by distance or by time, and ready, on the slightest call of duty, to rise up from their silent harbor, and display their strength in the most disinterested and arduous exertions.

Michael's duty, as an elder, took him more than for-

merly into the houses of his brother parishioners, most frequently in company with Mr. Kennedy, but often alone; and sometimes, too, his wife and daughter went with him when his visits were to the sick or the poor: nor was Aunt Isobel ever found absent when she could be a comfort by fire or bedside. Thus Lucy, who had now reached her tenth year, had her wild spirits tamed down by the knowledge of duty and distress. As quiet and still were all the pretty creature's motions in a sick room, as they were dancing and gleesome on the green sward. The smiles that were native to her eyes were not the smiles of heartless levity, that soon cease to charm even on the face of beautiful childhood, but they were the smiles of an involuntary joyfulness she could not help, and never tried to cherish, intermingled as it was by nature with the innocence of a guileless heart. The more love she gave away, the more did love overflow within her bosom. She loved her father, her mother, Aunt Isobel, Isaac Mayne, his sisters, his parents — all with a different affection; and meek Mary Morrison, who dwelt beyond all the braes, for her she kept, as it were, a secret corner of her heart, where none other entered but she; and if weeks and months passed by, and no Mary Morrison came over to Bracken Braes, yet still the unobscured image of that sweet girl was almost the same as her living self; and often, often did Lucy commune with it sitting in her parlor, or beneath the shadow of the plane, or by some little clear spring among the hills, whither she had gone to bring home the watercresses, or to see what was now the number of the spring lambs. Little as Lucy had seen or heard, that little was all pure and good, or it was the purifying grief that follows repentent guilt; so that, although a mere child, she was in her innocence wiser than she knew, and had learned to look, even with a thoughtful eye, both on human joy and human affliction.

Never, even in her happiest pastimes, was Lucy disinclined to go with her father or mother to the hut of Elspeth Riddel the widow, who had been a widow, and had lost all her twelve children, upwards of thirty years

ago. Close to the side of that frail image, now upwards of ninety years old, would Lucy stand, with upward eyes swimming in reverent pity, while the long locks, white as the driven snows, hung over the golden glow of the maiden's tresses, that changed their lustre at every motion of her head. Lucy, at her bidding, would read the Bible in that lonely hut; and Elspeth said, that, although somewhat deaf now, she never lost a word of that low, sweet, distinct voice. Garden flowers, too, she would often take to that hut; and Elspeth, dim as her eyes were, knew them all by name, in a moment; for, long before even Lucy's father was born, had she often gathered such flowers as these for the bosoms of pretty maidens, like Lucy herself, who had all, long since, gone down in old age to the grave. "Ay, ay, Mrs. Forester, I have seen generation after generation, and bonny faces are for ever passing away on the earth, but a bonnier face than that o' your ain Lucy saw I never in a' my lang days, and that I say before hersel, for the lassie that will come and speak comfort to an auld forgotten ruin o' a human creature like me, may be felt, without scaith, o' her beauty, perfect as it is, like the beauty o' the rose of Sharon."

Often, too, did Lucy visit Mooredge — a house only less solitary than that of Elspeth Riddel, whose hut, indeed, had no name, a mere turf sheiling, that had been built in a single day. In the comfortable cottage of Mooredge lived Allan Laidlaw and his wife, now a cheerful couple, although the very summer when the Foresters came into the parish, their three sons had been drowned in attempting to cross a ford of the Tweed, when the river was in flood. To hear these old people laughing and talking, one would have thought that they had never been acquainted with grief; but Lucy had often seen them when no smiles were in the house, and when both Mr. Kennedy and her father, who had come there to pray with them, that from such perfect resignation as theirs, they would carry comfort to their own homes, but that they could add nothing to such a frame of spirit. "It is not time that cures our sorrows, Mr. Kennedy," would the old woman say; "for time would weary, and waste

out, and distract the souls of us mortal creatures. No, no, it is not time, Mr. Forester ; for as plainly, as clearly, as distinctly do I see now the faces of my three drowned boys, as I saw them on that day when they were dragged out of the cruel waters ; and if me and Allan had no other comfort, long ere this hour would we baith hae gaen down in sorrow to our graves."

Thus passed the days of Michael Forester and his family. Ten years it was since they had left Dovenest ; and, although they had their share of those ordinary anxieties and sorrows that will pass over the surface of the calmest life, yet, during all these ten years, they had known only one miserable night and day, when they feared Lucy had been lost or dead. And what gratitude could ever repay such happiness ? What if severest trials awaited them, had they not been the favorites of heaven, and had they not reason humbly to trust that, in their lives, their Maker was well pleased ?



CHAPTER XI.

It was the cheerful season of bark peeling, and Michael Forester had been, for several weeks, employed in felling a pretty extensive wood, about five miles from Heriot Water, on the edge of the Hirst — a large and old estate belonging to a branch of the Cranstouns. Michael had many persons, of both sexes and all ages, working under him ; and not contented with being merely an overlooker, he had the axe frequently in his own powerful hand, and thus added to his other gains the wages of a laborer, always high in that severe and dexterous employment. Sometimes he slept all night in a sheiling in the wood ; and, on these occasions, Lucy would come tripping over the hills, and try to surprise her father by laughing in at the door, even before he had left his heather bed in the

first glow of sunlight. She carried to him, in her basket, provisions for the day ; remained near him till twilight among the fallen trees ; and, more than once, indeed, she had stayed with him all night in the sheiling.

It happened that Michael Forester had been detained in the wood for two successive nights, and, therefore, the whole family, Agnes, Aunt Isobel, Lucy, and their three days' visiter, Mary Morrison, determined to pay him a visit at his work, and bring him home with them in the evening to Bracken Braes. They took with them what would be considered quite a feast in the forest ; and Aunt Isobel selected a bottle of the choicest cowslip wine, of that celebrated vintage, which had proved victorious over all competition at an annual meeting of an Edinburgh Horticultural Society. Lucy said she had selected a dining room, on a spot of ground, smooth as velvet, near a spring, over which the huge arm of a fallen oak hung like a canopy that, now and then, fluttering in the breeze, and tempered to a pleasant coolness the strongest heat of the sun. " There will you three sit — father, mother, and Aunt Isobel — while Mary and I will wait at table ; and, if you please, sing you a song when you are drinking your wine." Lucy and Mary Morrison carried between them the basket of provisions covered with its white cloth ; and thus they stepped cheerfully along over hill and hollow, often hurrying far before, and often loitering far behind Agnes and Aunt Isobel, who took their own good time, not caring if they should not reach the wood till one o'clock, the hour at which their table was to be spread in that wilderness.

The little party, under the guidance of Lucy, penetrated, not without some difficulties in their way, into the heart of the wood, which covered nearly thirty acres. " What a change since yesterday ! " exclaimed Lucy ; " I saw naething o' that brae and that wee bit bonnie glen yestreen. The auld oaks, as they fa', let many a secret place come into the open light. Waes me for a' the birds and their nests — there's a poor shilfa mourning for her young." Michael beheld them all approaching with a pleased surprise, and left his axe in a wide gap

across the stem of a noble oak that reached nearly to its heart's core, and would soon prostrate the giant with the earth. It was, indeed, now the hour of rest and refreshment, and all the clashing and crushing sounds ceased in the forest, "This way, father — this way, father," cried the joyful Lucy; "all of you follow Mary Morrison and me, for we are going to lay the table cloth in the Queen Fairies own dining-room; and a long before the moonlight we will leave it, without disturbing any of the furniture, to herself and her silent people."

"Remember, lassie, that we are not all so young as yourself. Here am I, an auld woman of threescore and seven — for ten has a fearful sound — and I have walked five good miles without crutch or staff. Come hither, Lucy, like a bit roe as you are, and give me your arm to lean on while I take my breath on this branch. Preserve us, what a thickness o' moss, and what soft, gray, blue, red, yellow — ay, all the seven colors, o' the rainbow, a' glowing with gold and silver on the bark of a fallen tree. Yet the bark peelers will strip it aff and fling it aside without ever looking at it. Dear me! that so many tall trees o' the forest should be brought low to — tan leather! And yet — I forgot ships maun be built — to say nothing o' houses. Agnes, my dear bairn, is not this wood, in its ain way, a very paradise?"

That word, which Aunt Isobel pronounced with a sort of half self-reproving smile, was not in this case altogether misapplied. For labor, the lot of man, seemed here, even in its severity, to partake of the character of a pastime. Here, from one party, the ringing axes, as they kept at regular intervals biting the knotted oaks, brought the short shrill echoes out of the gray cliffs that, ever and anon, shewed some new shaped crag, formerly hidden by the umbrage. There a group of women, girls, and boys, and among them some mere infants were beating the short limber branches, while a nursing mother, a little apart, wrapped in her red gypsy cloak, hushed her baby, and then returned cheerfully to her work. In one place, a number of strong men were hauling trunks or huge arms of trees out of the way, with merry cries, like

those of sailors at the weighing of anchor. In another place, lads were heaping up the poles together in pyramids, or binding the low cords of fire or spoke wood. "A rae, a rae," exclaimed many young voices; and away bounded the beautiful animal, with twenty shepherds' dogs barking in vain behind its flight. The squirrels, startled at the noise of the chase, ran higher up the branches of the standard oaks; and the large white owl, issuing from his crevice in the yew tree, kept floating about in the darkness of the daylight, and then settled on a branch with his clerical countenance, to the infinite amusement of all the shouting imps in the wood.

"Come along — come along," said the impatient Lucy; "you see they have all left their work. Put your hand on my shoulder, Aunt Isobel; I see Mary Morrison is helping my mother down the brae." A dozen different little dinner parties were now forming themselves in nooks and corners; while the linnets and the chaffinches, in the underwood, or on the spared trees, whose nests had escaped the general devastation, began to take advantage of the silence, and were chirping and carolling in the shaded sunshine. The cushat, too, moaned from his pine; and two or three herons came flapping their slow and silent wings from some distant lake or stream to the elm grove that, for the sake of those noble birds, was suffered to stand with all its hereditary nests.

Lucy, with finest eye and ear, had selected the place for their forest feast. It was a close scene, yet in that covert was felt the whole spirit of the wood. Within the circle of an old charcoal burning place, the ingenious creature had so placed several wreathed limbs of trees, intermingled with roots and tendrils, that they formed one continued couch, with resting-places for back and arm, and enclosed a slab sawn off an antique ash, which, supported by four pillars of unpeeled birch, formed a table at once elegant and commodious. That table was soon set out by Lucy and Mary Morrison; and, as soon as the laughing glee had subsided, Michael blest the table, and, after a moment's silence, the feast began.

“Why, Mary, had not you and I green clothes, and then we would have been very fairies? But Aunt Isobel is looking for a cup of nectar.” And off flew the laughing Lucy, with her golden tresses, dancing in her delight, and from that spring brought water clearer and brighter than any diamonds; while meek Mary Morrison moved round the circle with gentler steps, and with suitable demeanor, almost as if she had been indeed a servant.

Agnes, who had not been out of the lone pastoral country of Heriot Water for several years, felt her tranquil heart kindled by the beautiful forest scenery; and, as she looked over the multitude of fallen trees through the stems of the standing wood, she remembered Dovenest, Hawthornden, Dryden, Lasswade, and Roslin. “O Michael! you surely will not fell yonder tree; look at it, and say if it be not the identical image of the oak that stands beside the ford across the Eske, at the very borders of Dovenest.” — “Why, my Agnes, Dovenest, our house and our gardens, and our trees, all are gone, or if not gone by this time, so much changed, that even you would not know the place. They are building there a paper mill; the mill lead runs where were our gravel walks; and the wheel goes dashing round where our father died and our Lucy was born.” — “And why not?” said Aunt Isobel, with a cheerful voice: “what were the walls but stone and lime; and the trees and shrubs, and even the flowers, what but dead matter, without thought and feeling? There is, at least, no change in our hearts, my son, but what, I hope, is a change for the better. For my own part, never was I so happy; I never saw you both so happy either at Dovenest or Sprinkeld as you are this blessed hour. There was no Lucy then. ‘Come hither my pearl.’” And while old Aunt Isobel kissed Lucy’s forehead, they were all silent in the hush of happiness.

“Ha! ha!” cried Lucy, “yonder is auld blind Sandy Paisley with his fiddle. Only look, father, how his bonny wee dog, Princy, leads him through among the briars and branches; and how, with his staff feeling round in all directions, the auld man, without a single stumble, is

making his way along the wood! See now; he kens folk are near at hand, for Princy is beginning to cock up his ears and bark; so Sandy has taken his seat on a stump, and now for his 'fiddle! Ay, you'll hear him singing too — hush — it is puir Tannahill's sang, wi' Mr. Smith's music — 'Jessie the Flower o' Dumblane.'"

As soon as Sandy Paisley's voice and violin were heard, there was an end to all the dinner parties in the wood, and the old blind musician was quickly surrounded by a crowded audience. 'Two or three young girls joined in the song; and Sandy Paisley then instantly changed his voice into a firm, deep, low, tremulous second, that charmed the most ignorant and uninitiated in the mysteries of music. "A reel, a reel," was now the general cry; and half a dozen couple beat the sod to Tullochgoram, while Sandy yelled amain at every turn, and moved his bow hand till the fingers were almost invisible.

"Are these draps o' rain," quoth the blind man, "plashing on the grun' like lead? And callants and cutties, dinna ye find it close, and sultry, and breathless? Tell me, are there no ony black clouds in the lift? Hear till't — that growl comes frae the west. The thunder will be rattling like artillery owre our heads by the time I hae played three times baith parts o' 'The Flowers o' the Forest.'" Sighing sounds went wavering all over the wood; the western horizon, far and wide, was blackened; and all the work people flew to seek shelter from the thunder storm.

Agnes had always been overcome by a thundery atmosphere, and had indeed, for an hour past, felt great oppression; but in such a happy scene, she concealed her sickness, and had said nothing. Michael, after ordering the work people to keep away from the standing trees, carried Agnes, almost fainting, in his arms, and laid her on the heather bed in the sheiling where he had slept for the last two nights. Aunt Isobel sat down beside her; and Michael, taking Lucy and Mary under his protection, lay down with them under some leafy branches.

The thunder cloud was now right over their heads, and seemed to explode like a cannon.

Every person in the wood, for the space of a moment, was stunned; and there was all around, in the hotness of the unbreathing air, a strong smell of sulphur. Many started to their feet, happy to feel, by the use of their limbs, that they were unstricken, while a greater number lay concealed in fear among the bushes, from which, now and then, was lifted up the frightened face of some cowering urchin. "Where is Mr. Forester?" cried twenty voices; and Lucy, who had been lying almost in his arms, leaped to her feet, and stood over her father, who was yet motionless, and seemingly insensible.

While the thunder went away, growling over the wood and the moor beyond, into the eastern mountains, many hands were assisting Michael Forester. Mary Morrison was lying by his side; but, in a few minutes, she awoke, as if from a dream, and looked about her unharmed. There were no outcries — no clamorous voices — all was nearly silent. Michael seemed to recover his recollection; and the first words he was heard to say were — "Lucy — Lucy, how is your mother!" Lucy heard the words with many sobs; but her sobs were changed into shrieks, for she looked wildly into her father's face, and saw that he was blind. The fire of heaven had scorched out his eyes, and Michael Forester was never more to see either the heavens or the earth.

Michael felt that there had been dealt to him a sudden and severe dispensation. But his soul knew not, as yet, what might be the extent of its great loss, for he knew not whether Agnes and Lucy were alive or dead. Isobel had left Agnes stunned into a swoon by the noise of the bolt; but, by this time, she had somewhat recovered, and came out into the open air. Michael now heard both her voice and Lucy's, and though it was the voice of weeping and lamentation, yet was he now content. "Puir man — puir man," said blind Sandy Paisley; "is it, indeed, a God's truth, that Mr. Forester has been blinded by the lightning? Puir man, I pity him," and he clasped his hands together in strong compassion,

the very hands that held the string by which his dog led him from house to house.

In a little while, one of the boys came from another part of the wood, and said — “Sarah Fleming is killed.” “Puir orphan,” said a voice — “Sarah hadna much in this world to wish living for — but she was a hard-working harmless thing, and quarrelled wi’ naebody.” Two of the woodcutters brought the body to the spot, where all the others were now assembled, and laid it on the ground. There was no disfigurement of face or figure, but the orphan girl was manifestly dead. She had neither brother nor sister, nor any relation working in the wood. Indeed, she had been an only child of parents who died before she knew their faces. And although, for a week or two, every one pitied Sarah Fleming, her death made small void in that little circle, and, on the second Sabbath, only a very few missed her face in the kirk.

The body of the orphan now lay unheeded, not from indifference to her fate, but from a sense of the unavailingness of pity; while every one was sorely disturbed about Michael Forester, and many tried to persuade themselves that there still might be hope, and that his eyesight might be restored. But Isobel in her aged composure, Agnes in her exceeding love, and Lucy in the distraction of childish tenderness, all alike knew that hope there was none, and beseeched the workmen to carry Michael to Bracken Braes.



CHAPTER XII.

FROM the first moment there had been no hope for Michael Forester. This he had himself known — Agnes, Lucy, and Isobel, and all who had seen the nature of the affliction. It was a sudden and total change from light

to darkness — from free bounding motion over all the varieties of the uneven earth, to anxious and timid steps along the floor of a sick room, or at last to be guided by some living hand within a safe and narrow circle of unencumbered ground, set apart for the exercise of the blind. Such visitations come alike upon humility and pride, sweeping the low and the high places, so that the cottar and the king are equally insecure as the worm that is trodden upon among the grass. Oh! what thoughts weighed on Michael's mind as he felt himself carried in pain and darkness up and down the hills towards Bracken Braes! Thoughts of dependence and uselessness, perhaps of a life to be sustained on charity! what a change since the morning he had left them, as he heard the door of his house opened, and knew that he was to see that roof and that plane tree no more! Utterly extinguished were those clear bright bold eyes that had never been afraid to look into any man's face — no more to gaze over the meadows and pastoral braes of his farm — no more to be turned in the delight of pious knowledge towards the glorious luminaries of heaven — to see sweet little fair-haired Lucy and her laughing eyes no more — nor her innocent hands folded in prayer before her Maker. Unseen by him was henceforth to be the meek beauty of his Agnes. But her soft low voice, that was still to be enjoyed far more than ever, and that blessed head was yet to lie nightly within his bosom. The dire distress met a sort of dim and awful contentment in the depth of his spirit as it descended there; and on the morning of the second Sabbath, as he heard and knew the sound of familiar feet and voices, somewhat as it seemed more cheerful and unconstrained, Michael Forster knew not whether he might not almost be called happy.

"I never heard the kirk bell so distinctly before. What a calm and clear aired day must it be, Agnes! Has Lucy gone with Aunt Isobel to the kirk?" Lucy had that moment come into the room, and her father knew her lightest footstep — for, even already, in one little week, had his thoughts and feelings begun to trust

more than before to the intimations of the ear. He took his child's hand into his, and felt that her small fingers were enclosing her Bible. "Be happy, my Lucy, in the house of God, for I am happy." Lucy's eyes were all filled with tears; but Aunt Isobel called to her, with a kind impatience, from the outer door, that the first bell had ceased; so the child gave her father a farewell kiss, and by the time they had crossed the wooden bridge, the sun was shining so joyfully, the stream murmuring along with such a cheerful tune, and the lark so happy in heaven, that Lucy's cheeks were dry, and the bright calm of childhood established in her bosom, permanent as the blue region of air lying without a cloud from the morning till the evening of some long summer day.

The house was filled with the stillness of Sabbath, and the other few inmates had left Agnes sitting by her blind husband. "O Michael! I am a poor weak being, and I fear that I have not been, in too many things, a good poor man's wife. When I look back on our eleven married years, I see myself cherished, and cared for at all times like the best lady in the land. For me and Lucy has my husband toiled early and late, and in all weathers, while I was idle by the fireside. If Agnes Hay was in comfort, my Michael thought not of himself: and, O may my Maker now graciously be pleased to enable me to do my duties — different as they must henceforth be — else better that I had never been born. O that this dispensation had fallen upon me! for I am but little worth in the house, and would have been well contented to be still and humble in the loss of sight, while you were busy as before at all your works. O my husband! if ever I have been self-willed, or forgetful, I will weep in remorse of my sins; for you taught me everything I know, and without your communications of what I owed to God and my fellow-creatures, more worthless should I have been than even what I feel myself to be, with such a burden of love and duty now laid upon my heart."

The blind man would not interrupt that piteous voice, for it reconciled him to his fate. He sat up in his bed, and taking Agnes' hand into his — "This ring," he said,

with a smile, "I put on thy hand with joy, when thou wert the fairest of the fair — nor have years yet impaired thy beauty. Blind I am, and must for ever be ; but thy face will yet be visible, nor will thy smiles ever be as nothing in my memory. Never once, Agnes — never once — hear me, O Heavens ! from whom came the scorching lightning — hast thou given me one moment's unhappiness ! and if thou repinest not — I shall be as happy — it may be happier than ever. But I know you will not repine ; for Agnes Hay, child, maiden, and mother, waking and asleep, by her own hearth, in the open air, and in the house of God, hath ever been a Christian."

Now for a while silent, and now speaking to each other a few affectionate words, three hours had passed away, and the congregation had left the kirk. "Agnes, think if my eyes had been yet unextinguished, and our Lucy dead, what then would have been the darkness and the silence of Bracken Braes ? Both of us had then, indeed, been worse than blind ; for what then to us had been the unavailing light ? Methinks the dear lassie will soon be returning from Divine service, or perhaps they have taken her and Aunt Isobel to the manse."

Lucy had come into the room with feet silent as the shadows, and had heard her father's words. Well she knew how dear she was to her father ; but, this expression of it, so overheard, carried her into heaven. She stood still at the foot of the bed — a guardian angel, unseen by him for whom she wept.

"Agnes, why are you sobbing ?" said Michael ; but his Lucy came up to his pillow, and at once melted and overawed, knelt down, and breathed a prayer, of which the few simple and broken words were, assuredly, not unheard in heaven.

In the cool of the evening, Mr. and Miss Kennedy came from the manse to Bracken Braes. Aunt Isobel had had warning of the visit, and had the house in the same cheerful order as if they had been invited to a festival.

"Come Lucy, snod your hair a little, and dinna look as you had been crying." And, at that kind command,

Lucy smiled from her very heart. The tea table was got ready in Michael's room; and the presence of Mr. and Miss Kennedy imposed a pleasant restraint on any too mournful feelings that might otherwise have arisen. The minister knew the character of his elder, and his words of comfort were but few; but they were chosen by a fine and pious mind; and the grace before and after that meal touched chords that long continued to sound in the resigned silence of the blind man's spirit.

Aunt Isobel, who had kept moving to and fro, now ushered in Sandy Paisley.

"I hope you'll no be offended, Mr. Forester, wi' my coming to see how you are after your calamity. A blin' man like me can feel mair than others in sic a trial; but he can, maybe, likewise gi'e mair comfort.

Auld Sandy Paisley was kindly welcomed, and shook hands with Michael in his bed. He was privileged to speak, lowly as he was in character and condition — for he was upwards of seventy, and had been in darkness for forty years.

"Wud ye believe me, Mr. Forester, when I say it, that it's just like a dream to me, the time when I saw the heaven and the earth, the stars and the flowers, human creatures and the animals o' the brute creation? My faith, 'gin I were to get the use o' my e'en now, how I wad glower at a' the outward works of God! Guid troth, I'se warrant I couldna comprehend them half as weel as I do now. It wad be a sair confusion."

There was a gladsome tinkle in the old contented creature's voice that made these few words a homily to all their hearts, and Lucy put the tea cup into his hand with more than usual care and gentleness.

"I recollect that I was gaen gleg frae the first week o' my blindness. Before that, I never could walk twenty yards wi' my e'en shut, without being terrified o' running owre a precipice, or a coach and six, although I was in a hay field. But nae sooner was I blin', than away I marched right leg foremost, without fear o' stumbling owre a stane or a straw. I felt a little nervish and queer sometimes before I got a doggie and string; and ye wad hae

leuch to split your sides to hae seen me loupin as if I had been demented, high up in the air, and wi' a lang spang, at a bit runner o' water, aiblins the preadth o' my twa hands. I hadna learned then, ye understand, to calculate soun's; and when I knoited the ba' o' my foot against a stane, I wud eaper as if I had run foul o' a haill cart load o' road metal. But these are auld times: noo I gang dannerin alang as stedy as a rock, or rather like a ship under sail in a fine breeze on the ocean.

The loquacity of some people — one can scarcely tell why — although endless is not tiresome — and such now was the loquacity of this old blind mendicant. "We're gaun to hae a fine summer o't, I'm thinking. I ken by the sangs o' the birds in April what is to be the nature o' July. O but I like the lang days that gang snoving so cannily down the skies, for then I carena whar I sleep. I just drap down behint a stane or a dyke, wi' the kine lying round about me, and the wee bit moorland birds twittering, like perfect nightingales as they are, wi' sma' interruption through the star hours. Deevil the fear o' ony rheumatics, for I seldom want a drap o' the cretur in a bit leather bottle I keep in ane o' my pouches. Gude safe us!" — "Nay, Sandy, my honest friend, a little more reverent in your language." — "Pardon, pardon, Mr. Kennedy, and all the rest. I'm but a puir, senseless sinner" — letting his voice drop at the same time — "and what would become o' me, stane blin,' and no sae far aff four score, 'gin my Maker should forget me wandering by mysel along the highroads, or among the hags o' peat mosses on the lonesome moors."

Michael Forester felt his whole nature strengthened by Sandy's cheerful resignation. Shall I repine, he thought, or question the merey of God's judgments, when I hear this childless, houseless, gray-haired beggar so happy, over whose dying hour there may be none to watch when it comes, perhaps, upon him in a snow wreath, or a storm among the hills! "Did I ever tell you," continued Sandy, "the story o' the brig? Weel, then, you see there had been spate in the Yearn Water the day o' John Borland's wedding, and the broose was to

be frae the Manse o' Mearns into Eaglesham. Thinks I to myself I should like to see the broose — that is, to hear the brassie; for I had a kind o' an interest in ane o' the pownies — Bob Howie's Pyet. So awhile afore the start, aff I sets, intending to take my station on a bit knowe at the brig end. A kittle turn it was — half way down a stey brae. As I was standing on a bit knowe, hearkening about me, there was something I didna weel understand in the soun' of the Yearn, a maist desperate gurgling, and growling, and rampaging o' water; and the roar seemed to gang clean up to the skies, without ony deadening effec' o' stane and lime. O ho! thinks I, what's become o' the brig? I gangs cannily on, fit by fit, wi' Service before me — (no the same doggie as that aneath my chair, but the father o' him;) and Service, to be sure, youfs, and turns about, and rugs at the string, like a trout that has been weel heucked wi' a bait heuck. The bonnie brig o' Humbie had sunk down before the spate like a pack o' cards; and, heaven hae mercy! there comes the broose, along the flat afore the rising o' the hill, a' galloping like mad, wi' a score o' lads riding double, wi' bonnie lasses ahint them. Puir blin' creatures, they were a' galloping to destruction. Up I gets, and awa like lightning, wi' Service barely able to keep up wi' me; for he was rather pechy, and had never seen his master fleeing in that gate afore — roaring out, 'The brig's down — the brig's soopit awa by the spate.' I heard Bob Howie on the Pyet — for weel I kent the cratur's feet like so many hailstones — 'The brig's fa'en down;' but on drove the wild deevil — for he feared naething in this world — while, thinks I, 'The Pyet'll flee owre the Yearn, and ne'er ken the brig's missing.' However the broose fell lown, and the Pyet came back to where I was stan'ing, close to the hedge; for there was a power o' rough shod cattle. 'Ye hae saved the lives o' mony o' us, Sandy,' said John Borland; 'what reward shall ye have?' Says I — 'A kiss o' the bride.' And I pried her mou, (I ask your pardon, ladies,) for I was a young chiel then — no exceeding saxty — and I had known Nancy Whitelaw since she was a bairn.

Never played I wi' sic birr as at that wedding; and the company collected for me ayont thretty shillings, to say naething o'claes. 'The truth maun be spoken — I wasna quite sober for half a week after. 'There's a gude deal o' meaning in that story, Mr. Kennedy; but aiblins you have heard it before, though I never tell 't twice the same way; and yet every way is the true ane.'"

In an hour all visitors were gone. Agnes and Lucy accompanied Mr. and Miss Kennedy as far as the linn; and old Sandy Paisley retired thankfully to his straw bed in an outhouse — the sort of lodging which the blind mendicant had preferred to every other for many years.



CHAPTER XIII.

IT was within his own heart and his own home that Michael Forester found the most effectual consolation under his irremediable calamity; but the universal compassion felt for him over the parish, and expressed in a hundred affecting ways, could not but breathe its own peculiar comfort. He knew that there was not a single fireside, for many miles round, at which he was not thought of, and prayers offered up for the welfare of his family. Not a day passed without children dropping in with inquiries from their parents; and offers were made and accepted to perform, gratuitously, little pieces of work about the farm which could not be delayed, now that the power of the summer season was strong on the earth. In the discharge of his duties as an elder, Michael had been in every house in the parish. Families with whom he had scarcely any other acquaintance, now visited him with much of the affectionate solicitude of old friends; while the few to whom he had long been attached by an intimate friendship, behaved like brothers, or sons, or fathers. If there were any persons who look-

ed on the Foresters with unkindly feelings — of envy, or jealousy, or causeless offence — they now dismissed all such recollection from their minds, and bore testimony to Michael's worth and the piety of his resignation. Even Elspeth Riddel — the old lonely creature of ninety — who had not been able to attend the kirk for several years, tottered down to Bracken Braes, and on the utmost verge of life, with the world fast fading away from her dim eyes, and all its bands long ago broken, she eagerly beseeched Michael to tell her how his mind bore this dispensation, and smiled cheerfully when she heard his collected reply, like one still interested in this scene of shadows.

Michael had now almost completely recovered his former strength; and, at first sight, a stranger could not have discovered that he was blind. His deportment had always been quiet and grave, although he was a man of great strength and activity; and his blindness had occasioned but a slight alteration in his appearance and his movements. His high, broad, ample forehead, chiefly fixed the notice of those who regarded him; and in the pleasant calm of his other intelligent features, it was not at first observed that his eyes were extinguished. Michael Forester was generally the tallest man present; and his naturally straight and erect person was little, if anything, depressed now by the feeling of helplessness or insecurity. On the contrary, much was added to its dignity by that settled calm which, approaching to melancholy, was only found not to be so when you entered into conversation with him, and found his mind alert upon all topics, and full as ever of the power of intelligence and enjoyment. While ordinary — perhaps frivolous — mirth and amusement went on about him, Michael sat, unaware, perhaps, of the trifling pleasures stirring in the room; or, if aware of them, he allowed them to proceed without regret or reproof. He remembered what he had himself been a couple of months ago, and was glad to think that those pleasant pastimes which sweeten life were going on in his presence, although he could now take little or no

active part in such recreations. Voices now were to him the sole symbols of affection and happiness; and he felt himself every day recognising shades of tone in the voices of those he most loved, that expressed to him all the varieties of the most watchful feeling, and seemed even to yield him a deeper knowledge than he had ever possessed before both of their love and their character. A word from his Agnes was now even more than a smile had been before; and when he heard Lucy laughing or singing, in or out of doors, he also at the same time saw the happy creature as vividly in her beauty as if he had gazed upon her with a thousand eyes. Already he felt the gracious processes going on within him, by which nature supplies those losses which would seem fatal to the peace of a mortal being, and finally converts into a blessing that elevates the whole life, that which still continues to appear to others to be a curse that would almost make death itself welcome to the stricken spirit.

It was now the time of the sacrament in the parish of Holylee. The kirk was a very small edifice, and with its narrow aisle, if the passage may so be called that divided the pews, was ill adapted for the celebration of that rite. Accordingly, it had been the usage, from time immemorial, to administer the sacrament in the open air. There was a low round hill, not far from the kirk, with a plat of level ground at its foot, of which, as it was a sheep pasture, the herbage was always smooth and short. Round this green eminence the streamlet glided away like a dream; and, within the distance of a few hundred yards, an unseen waterfall refreshed the place with a perpetual murmur. The knoll was covered with the congregation, and on the edge of the plat stood a tent from which the zealous minister addressed his flock. On that plat, too, the tables were spread — there the elders placed the bread and wine; and beneath the blue skies of heaven was ratified that mysterious covenant between fallen man and his Redeemer.

At this summer's sacrament, all eyes were turned upon Michael Forester. For several years before, he had been seen there acting as an elder; but now he did not ven-

ture to take upon himself any active duties. Kind way was made for him and his family, as, walking between Agnes and Lucy, he entered among the seats placed on the greensward. Lucy had hold of her father's hand, and every eye blessed the little beautiful guide. The blind man was delighted in his darkness to hear the rustle of the leaves of Psalm Book and Bible, as the congregation prepared to sing the praises of their God, or looked out the text from which their pastor was to preach the tidings of salvation. He thought of other meetings of other years, yet his soul was not dismayed.

During this solemn service, the eyes of one young creature especially, Emma Cranstoun, were often fixed on the family of the Foresters. She was then, indeed, the Lady of the Hirst; for her father had died several years ago, and her only brother was a prisoner of war at Verdun. Emma Cranstoun had been educated fashionably in England, and this was the first summer she had been in Scotland since her infancy. Although one so well born could not want friends, yet Emma, in the midst of riches and splendor, had long been as much to be pitied as the poorest orphan. Her heart was by nature formed for every pure affection, but it had been locked up during those years when the fountain of feeling flows with most force and clearness. Delicate health brought her to the Hirst, to breathe for a summer the air of her native hills; and being on a visit, for a few days, at the manse, she now attended the sacrament at Holylee, and took her place among the humblest parishioners. Early during the service her eyes had fallen on Agnes and Lucy, whom she saw to be mother and daughter. Michael's calamity she had heard spoken of, and her heart was suddenly touched with emotions of pity and admiration. Although there was little difference in their dress from that of their lowly equals, Emma Cranstoun saw at once about them a finer character of feeling and intelligence. Her heart was interested, attracted, drawn towards the group by the cords of some invisible sympathy; and, after the service was concluded, she told Miss Kennedy that she wished to speak to her tenant, Michael Forester. The impression

which, unaware to them, Michael and his family had made upon the young Lady of the Hirst, was rendered still more favorable during that short conversation; and Emma Cranstoun, who had scarcely ever before spoken to a cottager, because she had had no opportunities, was touched with a new delight on finding so much sense, grace, and beauty in those whom she had been taught to consider almost an inferior order of beings. Emma Cranstoun was but sixteen years old, and Lucy was eleven, so that her heart yearned towards the child at every blush that mantled round her downcast eyes; and she said within herself, that she would, that very evening, pay a visit to Bracken Braes.

Emma Cranstoun, the Lady of the Hirst, was accustomed to follow all her inclinations; but these were uniformly innocent. Self-willed she no doubt was, but her nature was a happy one, and even her caprices were virtuous. Her heart had been defrauded, by an imperfect education, out of much that was the natural dowry of youth; but it had received no taint of corruption. She had retained her simplicity in the midst of false or excessive refinement; nor had the hollow hypocrisies of those to whom the care of her early years had been committed, taught her any unconscious imitation of artifice or deceit. The creature of impulse she indeed was, but her impulses were all instinctively towards right actions and the society of the innocent like herself. Of this kind was her strong sudden emotion of love to Lucy Forester. It might be called a mere whim — a sport or sally of the humor — yet who could look on Lucy's face and say, that to love it at sight was either thoughtless or unreasonable? In the calm of the evening, therefore, Emma took with her a single domestic, and walked up the vale towards Bracken Braes.

With a delighted wonder at its perfect neatness, order, and beauty, the Lady of the Hirst stood below the plane tree and gazed on the cottage. The enchantment of heavenly music rose from within with many a joyful swell, and many a pathetic close. She knew that the family were praising their Maker — that this was the

evening psalm. She turned aside her head to listen more intently, and her eyes fell upon the golden light of the setting sun. The pure evening air — the walk up the vale — the whole solemn business of the day — and the novelty of all around her, worked upon her heart and her imagination; and when the hymn ceased, Emma felt the tears on her cheek, and drew a deep sigh of disturbed happiness. It seemed as if, since this Sabbath morning, a new life and a new world had been revealed to her, and that before this evening she had known little or nothing either of her own heart or of her fellow creatures.

Lucy was leading her father out to his seat below the plane tree, to enjoy an hour of its dim shadow, before they all retired to rest, when she beheld the Lady of the Hirst smiling upon her with the most affable benignity. "Father, father, our Lady is here," breathed Lucy in a whisper; and Michael turned respectfully towards the sweet voice of their visiter. Agnes and Aunt Isobel were soon of the party; and Emma sat on the osier seat beneath the tree, surrounded by her new friends, who regarded her with affectionate admiration. Agnes Hay was fair in her matronly serenity, and beautiful Lucy indeed was, with all her kindling smiles, half subdued by bashfulness and humility; but Emma Cranstoun possessed that charm which only high refinement can give, and which is altogether irresistible and inimitable when united, as in her it was, with simplicity as unaffected as ever belonged to rural innocence in the most solitary dwelling. "They say that the Cranstouns have ever been a beautiful family," whispered Aunt Isobel to Agnes; "but never, surely, since they bore that name, was there a fairer daughter of that house than that lovely image." Then, seeing a slight hectic flush on the lady's cheek, Agnes entreated her not to sit in the dews, but to honor a poor man's house with her presence.

The conversation led insensibly into the cares and joys, the pains and pleasures belonging to humble life. Emma Cranstoun asked a great many questions, but every

sentence seemed to awaken her heart. Hitherto she had seen, and only seen poor men's houses, and passed them by without a feeling or a thought. She had seen the smoke rising from the chimneys in the morning or evening calm, and thought it beautiful; but, as it dissolved in the air, it was forgotten, as if it had been a picture of an unreal thing. Now she looked with intense interest on all the furniture of the farm house; and homely as it was, in comparison with the splendor in which she had always lived, she could not but feel how interesting and appropriate it was, and how true the character of everything belonging to those excellent people was to their condition. "Are all the families of humble life like this?" thought the simple girl; if so, may I live all my days at the Hirst, and be a daily visiter among the cottages."

The sun had gone down, and there was now as much darkness as there would be during the whole night. The Lady of the Hirst, more than courteously, wished good night to Michael, Agnes, and Aunt Isobel; and happy indeed was Lucy to walk by her side, part of the way, to the Manse. "Do you think, my pretty Lucy, that you could love me; for I wish that we were friends?" Lucy was afraid to speak; the very thought of such a superior being to herself calling her friend, was more than the simple child could, for a moment, imagine. But all the way back from the manse, beneath the moon and the stars, Lucy was thinking, in her delight, what she could do for that beautiful lady — how she could serve her in any way, however small, only to shew her gratitude; and, when she thought on that sweet smile, and still sweeter voice, addressed to her blind father, Lucy felt that she could die willingly for one so free from pride, so lovely, and so compassionate. Agnes, whose quiet heart was yet at all times filled with tenderest anxieties about Lucy, this night laid her head on her husband's bosom with an assurance that her child had found a friend; and that fair and benignant creature was before her in her dreams.

CHAPTER XIV.

LITTLE more than half of Michael Forester's lease of twenty-one years had expired, when he had lost his sight ; and during the first despair of that deprivation, he had thought of giving up his farm. But he soon felt that there was no necessity for doing so, and that with faithful assistance he could continue to pay his rent, and do justice to the beautiful property he had so long cultivated. That assistance he had found in William Laidlaw, a nephew of the old childless couple at Mooredge. All the braes had long been clear pasturage — the holms by the streamlet's side were rich in natural soil and generous treatment — each enclosed field had been brought to sustain unexhausted its due rotations of crop — the small coppice woods, preserved from sheep and cattle, flourished amain with their oaks, birks, and hazels — while here and there among the hedge-rows stood an ash or an elm of no mean growth, and casting a grateful shadow in the pastoral solitude. Now that nearly three years had elapsed since his blindness, Michael had every reason to believe that Bracken Braes still preserved its superiority over every other farm in the parish.

During these three years it was astonishing what progress Michael Forester had made in that practical education which the blind pursue under the guidance of nature. Indeed, he had many and great advantages over the generality of men reduced to that condition. His strong natural talents and deep natural affections had all been genially cultured and cherished, so that, from the first week of his affliction, his mind and his heart had neither of them been left desolate. Thoughts and feelings had been stored up against that evil day, and the blind man felt strong in knowledge and in love. His habits had, from boyhood, been of a thoughtful cast ; and when the presence of the visible world was veiled from his eyes, his meditations only became more concentrated — or

rather more spiritual; but there had been no violent wrenching away or breaking off; and, in an incredibly short time, memory supplied the place of sight, and her images were substantial as realities. His body and his limbs were powerful and active beyond those of most men; and he soon learned to plant his feet on the ground without shrinking or timidity, and to walk along fearless of all obstructions. A hundred sounds unnoticed before were now familiar to him, each signifying something useful for the blind to know. He, by degrees, observed how all surrounding objects modified his perceptions. Measurements of relative distances were unconsciously made in his mind every shorter or longer walk he took, and paths became known to him alone, existing not to the eyes of others, but traced out by his ear and his touch. The stream could not wind its most noiseless way without his ear detecting the altered murmur over deep or shallow. He knew in a moment precisely where he stood, as the gentle din of the tiny waterfall rose up from among the hazles. The cawing of the rooks rising or falling on his ear, told him how far he was from the Hirst woods; and he knew, from the plover's cry, before he came to the edge of the moss. Echoes, that others heard not, whispered to him the path in his solitude. The hollow ground — the acclivity — the bent — the lea — the light gravelly soil — the heavy till — the moss turf — the heather patch — the wet rushy flat — the stony upland — here and there a huge rock — or an extended precipice — by help of these characters, he reperused in his darkness the country around him, that he had so long studied with open eyes; and thus every month he heard and felt his way farther and farther among the braes, hills, and mountains. He soon found that his long staff was indeed like a feeler, as old Sandy Paisley had told him, and that it was really every part of his existence. But it was not thus that all his practice had been acquired; for his gentle, patient, and devoted Agnes was for ever at his side; or, Aunt Isobel, whose lamp burned with a more cheerful glow as the mist of years gathered round it — or Lucy led the way with a dance and a song, or

hushed and silent as an undisturbed lapwing walking on the solitary lea. When alone, which he not unfrequently was, even at a distance from the house, he knew that the eye of God was upon every footstep of the blind, and beyond all doubt, that very calamity itself brought wisdom. The creature was told by a still small voice to throw itself upon its Creator.

In such a state of mind, what a blessing was such a wife as Agnes! What, if a vain, light, unintelligent woman had been called upon to assist and comfort him, even although conjugal affection had subsisted in her bosom! But here was a guardian being constantly near him, night and day, strong in peace, innocence, and piety. No stormy passion had ever broken the calm continuity of her blameless life. Never had she denied God or her Saviour, by vain repining or wilful disobedience. Her Bible had not been taken up casually, giving unwelcome intimations that were neglected in worldly cares, or that served only to sadden the heart with the touch of feelings too solemn and sacred to hold long alliance with mere earthly affections. But in that Bible she had, from the dawn of reason, seen revealed a light that never was eclipsed by the clouds of this world. Let her read that book a thousand and a thousand times, not a single page ever became wearisome on the repetition! To what state of the soul might not one or other of those touching parables be applied! On evening of work day, alike as on that of the Sabbath, had her heart ever been open to that Sermon on the Mount! So that when her blind husband was sitting by the fireside, that blazed with the old roots his own hands had collected, and Lucy working, or reading, or singing, beneath the quick notice of Aunt Isobel's eyes, while all the room was else silent, but the tick of the clock, or the rustling noise in his wicker cage of a thrush that had never known liberty; at such an hour, in that hut, restorative and like a voice from above was the memory of those words — "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!"

And during the three years of her father's blindness, how had his Lucy shot up into a stately flower! On that

disastrous day in the Hirst Wood, she was but a child — now she was the fairest maiden of all the hills. Month after month had Michael felt her head growing up beneath his hand — and he had not now to stoop so low to kiss her cheek. Her voice had lost much of its infantine tone, and was deepened into a mellow music. Free, still, were her motions in the open air as those of the fawn at play; but she stepped about the house, of which she had now her own part in the arrangements, with a blithesome carefulness; while at church, she sat as perfectly composed and attentive during the whole service as the oldest person. Her feelings were naturally quick, warm — almost impatient; and when left wholly to herself, Lucy might sometimes be wayward and headstrong; but when any duty called her to her father, then in a moment she was hushed, like a lark that drops down suddenly into its nest from the sky when the shadow of the hawk is seen on the hill side. Nor did Michael Forester deny to his Lucy any of the harmless pastimes suitable to her age. Each season had its holidays, and perhaps winter, with all its snow, gloom, and darkness, was to Lucy the cheerfullest time of all the year. Then she and the Maynes went for a month or two to the dancing, in a barn near the Manse, or to learn church music in the village school. But, above all, the other festivals that came between their long intervals of homely life, tinging them with the hues of imagination, was merry Halloween. In that secluded glen, the mirthful superstition of that night was felt to be prolonged almost from winter to winter. Bracken Braes was most frequently the chosen scene of the revels. The commodious kitchen was decked with branches of the hawthorn, red with its humble fruit — and with the holly boughs, cut without mercy, and in spite of all their prickles, to brighten the festivities. Then the easily excited spirit of childhood and youth threw all its feelings and all its fancy into the hazle-nuts that cracked away from the ruddy embers; and many a pretty face, in vain pursuit of the swimming apples, hung over the water-pail, with its long heavy tresses to be readjusted by the hand of some boyish sweet-

heart. Meanwhile the older people carried on their own conversation by the chimney nook, undisturbed by the noisy mirth that gave a happier flow to their own thoughts ; and many a joke went round the circle — the wit of the lowly mind that seldom lacks, in its contentment, a strong trace of kindliness, and wisely sports with the hardships of the poor man's life.

Nor had that visit of the young and beautiful Lady of the Hirst been the last, by at least a hundred, during those few years at Bracken Braes. Emma Cranstoun's heart had received, on that Sabbath, an impression which was never to be effaced. Not without great injustice could it have been said that the innocent girl had not before that day been a Christian ; for, in the midst of all the vanities with which her steps had been surrounded, she had never been a stranger to the place of worship, nor unacquainted with her Bible. But the influence that ought to have been prevalent and abiding, had been but partial and transitory ; that look had been taken up only at formal intervals of time far otherwise occupied ; and the Sabbath day, not more than decently observed, stood by itself uncommunicating with the week ; so that a pious spirit had still to be reawakened and renewed. Neither had the life she had been constrained to lead frequently stirred her best human affections. But as soon as her eyes had been opened to the knowledge, however limited, of humble rural life, she beheld before her wants that she could supply ; sorrows that she could assuage ; evils that she could avert ; and joys that she could increase tenfold ; while, thenceforth, all the precepts of Christianity, either of will or deed, seemed to call upon her for obedience and practice. She had carried the beauty of her presence into every house in the parish ; her charities, under the advice of Mr. Kennedy and Michael Forester, had become every season more effective ; and happy were all — rich, independent, and poor — to see that, on those errands of real religion, the lady whom all loved, had drawn new health from the pure gales of heaven — that all symptoms of that fatal malady had left her cheek — and that Providence, under whom she humbly served, had bidden her

own native hills breathe into her bosom a stronger spirit of life.

And where, during all those years, was poor forgotten Mary Morrison, Lucy's earliest friend? Had all their affectionate thoughts towards each other, as they had often sat in the same plaid, in the moors and mosses, passed away like the sounds and the shadows of that solitude? Had Lucy lost in her pride, now that she was a guest even at the Hirst, all her more than sisterly love for meek Mary Morrison in that lonely hut with her stern father? No; Lucy learned other lessons from Emma Cranstoun; and she who had been Mary's helpless friend in their infant days, had now become her benefactress. For she had ventured to speak to the Lady about Ewebank; and Abraham Morrison, with whom the world had gone hardly, had got such a reduction of his rent, and such remission of arrears, that he had not only kept his head fairly above water now, but, which was a great admission from him, acknowledged that he had reason to be contented. Lucy's love for Mary was the same as ever — there was no inequality in their condition — although Ewebank was, indeed, a far poorer place than Bracken Braes; and while Mary shewed, by her whole behavior, that she thought Lucy far her superior in all things, besides her beauty, in which there was none indeed to compare with her in both parishes; yet Lucy, true to the bliss of former days, and without even the shadow of change, saw in Mary the very perfection of sense and sweetness, and with the same open and yearning heart as ever, as she came from visiting the Lady of the Hirst, turned away up the narrow birchen glen of Ewebank, and by the ingle, or on the brae side, whispered away a few happy hours with Mary Morrison.

"O, Lucy, dear," said that humble creature, as one day they were sitting in their plaids on the hill, "do you know that I dream so often of my mother, that sometimes I think it must be her ghost that visits me in my sleep: she seems to weep — although not like one of us mortal creatures — and asks me if I am happy." — "How very young you must have been, Mary, when your moth-

er died ! for I never saw her ; but has she aye the same face in your dreams ? ” — “ Ay, Lucy ; the same white mournfu’ face she wore when I used to sit upon her knee. I remember it just as weel as if she had been buried yesterday. My father was not at home the day she was taken away. Oh ! dear Lucy, how my father looked and groaned for months — perhaps a year — after her death. Do you ken, I dinna think she was very happy : my father is unco severe sometimes, and if it werena for you, Lucy, I wud sometimes maist wish myself i’ the moul’s ; but when I think that surely we twa will be fréen’s a’ our days, then I canna help singing by mysel’, or being cheerfu’ as the morning. ” — “ Ay, sure enough, Mary, our love will never die ; and, long as we behave ourselves well, the Lady of the Hirst will be our friend. But look, Mary, the sun is going fast fast down. Farewell, farewell. ” — “ Oh ! dinna be lang o’ coming to see me again ” said Mary, with tears in her eyes ; “ and, above a’ things, dinna think that I lo’e not my father. O Lucy ! when my father smiles, or even when his countenance is without a frown, my heart beats as if I could gang up and kiss him ; and, after a’, every ane has his ain way, and my father has his : there is nae reason to think he doesna like me, his only bairn ; and when I was in the wanderings o’ that fever, he was, I am tauld, sairly distracted. ” The two innocent young creatures parted on the hill side — Lucy towards a cheerful home, filled with comfort, peace and affection, where blessings awaited her from every voice and eye ; Mary Morrison to a hut, perhaps silent and solitary, or overspread with the gloom of a parent’s countenance, who knew not how to look kindly in his affection upon his only child.

CHAPTER XV.

LUCY FORESTER's fifteenth spring was now dawning upon her beauty; and, although she had sometimes brought the tear to her mother's eye, and awoke Aunt Isobel's short-lived displeasure, by childish indiscretions and forgetfulness, yet, amidst all the allowable levities of girlhood that occasionally led her into little acts of disobedience, wilful or undesigned, one single instance of unkindness or neglect to her father had never been laid to her charge. Often and often had she refused making up parties of pleasure with her playmates, because he might expect her to take a stroll with him to a neighbor's house, or into the quiet pastures; and, not unfrequently, when, on the very eve of some rural festival, she found that it was right she should remain at home, the loving child had done so, not only without murmuring, but with a proud delight. Her childhood was now over, or nearly so; and her father, knowing that she was approaching the verge of that season when all life would insensibly appear to her eyes covered with a different color, and when her affections would be liable to wounds from many causes that to her had, as yet, no existence, felt an anxiety for her sake taking hold of his very heart, and almost disturbing his sleep. "Our happiness," he would sometimes say to Agnes, "has been too perfect to endure much longer;" and he began now to be unhappy whenever Lucy was out of hearing.

At the Manse there had lived, for about a twelve-month, a youth called Edward Ellis, the son of an English gentleman of fortune, who had been an intimate friend of Mr. Kennedy. He was now nearly seventeen years of age, extremely handsome, and a universal favorite over the whole parish. Edward Ellis was a boy of fine talents, but his mind had not yet taken kindly to books; and, although not at all deficient in the common scholarship of that early period of life, all that he knew had been learned almost intuitively, for his heart lay in those pursuits

that brought him into immediate and free intercourse with his fellow creatures. He rejoiced to accompany Mr. Kennedy on his walks or visits, and thus he had become quite a familiar guest at the firesides of the cottagers, and at none more so than that of Bracken Braes. He was not, of course, without the romance of that season of life, and Lucy Forester was the queen of his fairyland.

The love of Edward Ellis, however, was not such as to break his slumbers, destroy his appetite, or sicken him with his amusements. On the contrary, he slept as soundly as any cottar after a day's darg, ate heartily at all his meals, and few good days passed by in winter or spring that he was not on the hills with his gun, or on the banks of the river with his angle. His day's amusement, however, three times a week, terminated, somehow or other, very luckily just at the gate of Bracken Braes. Most happy were they to receive the noble boy at all times; and Michael's spirits, it was observed, were always raised by his animated, open, and intelligent conversation. "If all rich people, all ladies and gentlemen," thought Lucy, "are like Emma Cranstoun and Edward Ellis, how happy must life be in the palaces of great cities!"

Lucy was not often from home when Edward Ellis called there; but, when she chanced to be so, she felt something like a disappointment. She never went now on an errand down to the village — a dozen hamlets bearing the name of the parish — that she did not, unconsciously, entertain a hope that he might be angling within sight, or meet her somewhere in the neighborhood. She had never thought much about her own beauty, till she overheard Edward Ellis praising it in warm admiration; and, from that time, Lucy Forester would stand a few minutes at her mirror, after she had arranged her simple dress, and, perhaps, return to it again to alter a ringlet over her forehead.

The quick eye of Aunt Isobel saw, but without any pain, the attachment of their sincere and uncorrupted hearts. It was a delightful dream, that would, of itself,

pass away, and yet leave no wound behind. In another year, Edward Ellis was to return to England, and the image of Lucy would then seem to him like that of some shepherdess of whom he had read in a pastoral poem; while Lucy, happy in the humble enjoyments spread around her feet on the floor of her father's cottage, would let him depart for ever to the land of his nativity, nor send after him, when a month was gone, more than a tender wish for his perpetual welfare. Yet the thoughtful old lady, in praising Mr. Edward Ellis, always took care to speak of his departure from the glen as not far distant, and probably for ever; at which times, Lucy would give something almost like a sigh, and keep her eyes fixed pensively on the ground; but the indistinct dream soon deserted her imagination, and she would break out a-singing in her happiness.

There was a little waterfall of singular beauty, about half a mile from Bracken Braes, just half way down the stream to the Manse. The green hills closed in suddenly upon some low rocks that lay quite across the stream, so that the waters, parting in two nearly equal divisions, poured over in separate cascades into the pool; while between them rose up a natural pillar, from whose base sprung a few weeping birch trees, and a single mountain ash. About a rood of grass-plot was level with the sleeping waters below; and down into that solitary, but always cheerful place, a sheep track led along one side of the brae. An old decayed yew, covered entirely with ivy, and called the Howlet's Nest, stood within reach of the spray that kept its mantle in perpetual verdure. Here Lucy bleached the garments she brought from Bracken Braes, and here Edward Ellis was fonder of angling than in any other pool on all the water. Undesignedly, but fortunately, had it become a trysting place to these youthful lovers.

There are often days before February has closed, that come down unexpectedly, and without warning, from heaven, with a delightful summer feeling that is not exceeded in softness even by the balmy June. On such a

day, Lucy and Edward found themselves together beside the Howlet's Nest.

"Will Lucy Forester give Edward Ellis a lock of her hair, to keep for the sake o' the bonniest lassie in a' Scotland, when he may be wandering afar off, perhaps in a foreign country, away beyond the seas?"

"Oh me! Mr. Ellis," cried Lucy with a beating heart; "are you, indeed, going away from Holylee, never more to return?" And tears, she wished not to reveal, in the sincerity of her innocent affection, trickled down her cheeks, from which the rose leaf color had in an instant vanished.

"No, no, my sweet Lucy, not for another year at least; and that is a long long time, is it not? with many months of long summer days, and many months of long winter nights, it is hard to say which the happiest."

Lucy felt relieved from a deadly feeling; for a year, to her young imagination, did, in truth, appear an almost unbounded time; and, since Edward Ellis was not to leave Holylee for a whole year, she was again nearly happy as ever. Edward took one of her rich auburn ringlets that hung over her temples, and, while Lucy stood still in her joyful tears, he fastened a little gold brooch on her bosom, whose beauty, like that of the white lily, was alike fair in shade and sunshine.

"Now, Lucy, sing me one of Burns' songs; and, if you please, let it be — 'To Mary in Heaven.'"

The happy girl at once complied; and, while Edward Ellis laid his hand upon her shoulder with all the tenderness of youth, she sung that beautiful hymn to the melancholy accompaniment of the lonesome waterfall.

Isaac Mayne, the scholar and poet of the vale, came down the footpath, and stood before the pair, just as Lucy was singing, for the last time, the pathetic line that commences and closes the hymn. Isaac was several years older than Lucy — about seventeen — but having been in Edinburgh for successive winters, and when at home buried in his studies, he had not been much at Bracken Braes since she had been a mere child. Isaac

Mayne, however, under silent and shy habits, concealed strong passions; and while he seemed to be giving all his intellect and imagination to the study of books, he had yielded up his heart to violent human emotions. He had all along resolved, within his own heart, that Lucy Forester should, some day, be his wife; and the flower was growing, he thought, in its solitude, to the perfection of its nature, without any eye but his capable of discerning its consummate beauty. Sometime, during the last summer, he had looked on Edward Ellis with a jealous eye; and now that he had left Edinburgh for a single holiday, he came upon him standing almost in an embrace with his own Lucy Forester. Pride — rage — shame — jealousy — and grief — all entered his heart together; and, mere boy as he was — indeed what else were they all but children — the same pangs rent his breast as ever drove manhood into insanity or death. His pale cheek became sallow — his dark eyes flashed fire — he thrust his hand fiercely through his raven locks, and his frame, that had been feeble from his infancy, shook as in a slight convulsion. He scarcely spoke, but passed by frowning and sullen, and disappeared down the narrow pass, as if on his way to the Manse. Lucy wondered a little at his abrupt manner; but said, that poor Isaac Mayne was ruining his health and spirits by too deep study. Edward Ellis saw the truth, and, with the pride of a successful rival, laughed at the rude scholar, and said — “I hope Isaac will not drown himself for love.”

CHAPTER XVI.

“COME, Lucy,” said Aunt Isobel, “lay down your knitting, and give us a lilt, my lassie — any air you like; for your father seems drowsy, I think — your mother has not said a single word for at least ten minutes — yourself

have been mute as an image ever since you took that net into your hand — and not a soul can I get to converse with me. This is dull, dreary work; and that perpetual drive of blashing sleet against the panes is enough to deafen one's very life. Come, my bonnie bird, gie us something heartsome."

It was a genuine Scottish March night, wild as in winter. There had been a keen frost all day, and the wind had almost amounted to a hurricane. It had, with the fall of darkness, become more fitful; and, there being a sort of thaw, a thin, wet snow shower had, for hours, been whirling about the glens. Only the week before, and there had been many gentle appearances of spring. The gooseberry bushes were green in all the gardens — the hawthorn hedges had begun to bud — here and there the early willows had put out a few yellow blossoms to the chance bee — the forenoon sun had wakened the insect world — and the angler had been seen walking down the stream. But now the waters were again sheeted with ice — both rivulet and tarn; and the pale aspect of the skies had foretold that the shepherds would soon have work to do up among the hills. The noise without doors had made all silent within; but Lucy, always ready to waken from her short reveries, dropped her knitting at Aunt Isobel's request, and, laying her folded hands on her lap, and fixing her large soft hazel eyes on the floor, with her head and all its clustering ringlets tenderly inclined towards her father, who roused himself from his half slumber, and turned his face upon his child, smiling even as if he really saw her beauty brightening in the blaze of the kindled fire, she hummed a few low, sweet, uncertain notes, and then, richly and simply as the gray linnet, warbled one of her father's favorite ballads, the "Gaberlunzie Man" —

"The wind blaws cauld from Donought Head."

The small audience sat mute for a few moments at the close of the air, and Lucy had again taken up her work, when Michael said — "I hear a foot at the door — no

Gaberlunzie man, I warrant ; for, now-a-days, they keep better under cover on wild nights, and the beggar takes his supper comfortably by the ingle in the small wayside public house, if no cottar has taken him in. It will be one of the Raeshaw shepherds that have been down at the fords looking after the early lambs. Has he gone by without stepping in ? No ; that's a stranger's rap, and it sounds as from a feeble hand." Lucy sprang from her stool by her father's knees, but Aunt Isobel was before her. "Stand out o' the drift o' the door, ye delicate thing ;" and then she opened the door but a little, for the blast came down the glen in a very tempest. "Pity me, who are you that faces such a hurricane ? Come in — come in ;" and a figure in a tattered dress, covered with cranreuch and icicles, but in no haste to enter, came at last reluctantly forward on the floor ; while Aunt Isobel shut the door against the snow that had been drifting into the middle of the room. He muttered a few indistinct words to Isobel's reiterated questions, who and what he was ; and seemed as if he was not altogether in his right mind — although, perhaps, it was only the inclemency of the night that had benumbed his senses.

But Michael, the blind man, whose ear was finer than the mole's, rose from his chair, and advanced towards the stranger. "What ! are you an auld man, said ye ?" — "Aulder in sin and iniquity than in years." — "It is my brother Abel — as God liveth and dealeth mercifully — it is my brother Abel." The staff fell from the frozen hand, and Abel was upon his brother's bosom. Agnes and Isobel gazed upon the wretched man, but for a while they recognised him not — that ghost-like being could not be the laughing and blithe Abel of Dovenest ! But Michael feared not that it was his brother whom he held to his heart — for faint, broken, and feeble as that voice sounded, it was still the same voice that he had heard for so many years in that quiet garden. Lucy, who now and then had heard her uncle's name, but pronounced as the name of one assuredly in his grave, looked on the figure before her almost with fear, like one risen from the dead ; but, as she touched his withered hand, cold as the ice,

love and pity arose within her for her father's brother. Never before had Lucy seen her father weep; and in his tears there was something so awful to her young heart, that she shed none herself, but stood in perfect silence, a little aloof from that meeting.

They now saw through his utter wretchedness all that remained of the Abel of other happy days. Though he was cold to the touch, and quite frozen, yet he never shivered. His body was forgotten by him; and his mind, that mind once so quick and bright, so full of fancies for the young and feelings for the old, overflowing with resources for every season, it was now manifestly worn out, impaired, and shattered. He scarcely returned his brother's embrace: his eyes looked around bewildered and mistrustful; and he said — "Are not you Michael Forster, that lived once at Dovenest? If so, then hear me, Michael; for I am your brother Abel, who ruined you all by forgery; yet turn me not out of your door till the storm is over. Where is the old man, our father; for I see him not, and perhaps he is dead?"

A bed was soon made by the fireside, and the wanderer's head was on the pillow. Long had it been, no doubt, since the squalid beggar had lain on such a place of rest. Many years were at last over of houseless want that now had no record even in his own darkened memory. But there he now lay apparently in peace, with the snow white sheets carefully folded round him, that had been woven from their own few flax ridges, and spun by old and young hands in the long merry winter nights, when, alas! Abel was wandering far off and unknown! Fourteen years and more had passed since he had parted from them, in fear and danger, at Dovenest. And who, thought Michael, can count the agonies, the diseases, and the despair of all the hours, days, weeks, and months, that crowd themselves into so many unbefriended and homeless years?

"O Michael! what means that look about your eyes? What is it that I heard about you at a house near the mouth of the glen?" — "I lost my sight by lightning four years ago, brother; but I feel small loss of my eyes

now — yet would that for a little while I could see my Abel's face once more." Remembrances of old times now seemed to be crowding in upon his mind, but every word he spoke shewed how indistinct and confused they all were; while, of what he saw, or of anything connected with the present condition of the family, he asked not a single question, just as if his powerless understanding had submitted itself entirely to a dream. Much they wondered how he had found his way hither — where he had heard of them — and, above all, from what region had the wanderer come. Some instinct seemed to have led him, unawares, to Bracken Braes; for it was plain, from his wandering looks and unconnected words, that Abel knew not, for any continued length of time, in what quarter of the world he now was, nor whose fireside it was at which Providence had given him that bed of rest.

Perhaps there had been times, when anger had entered into Michael's heart, thinking on all the ruin which his brother had brought upon him — times too, when all anger had utterly ceased — when he had not only reconciled himself to the belief of Abel's death, but felt that it was better so, and that he did not even wish that he were in the land of the living. Then had come years almost of forgetfulness, and the blank of oblivion. Michael had never ceased, not, perhaps, even for a week, to think of Dovenest, and his father, and his brother. But that was the real living, innocent, and happy Abel; the brother of these latter years was nothing else but the image of a dim and disturbed dream. But now, from lands, perhaps, beyond the seas, and at the expiration of so many years of rueful banishment, had come the brother, whom he had so tenderly loved, to all appearance a dying man. Well was it for Michael that he did not see his brother; for, although yet a young man, his hair was quite gray, and all his features shrunk and fallen, like the face of old age. That voice told a mournful tale to the blind man's heart; but still he could not image before him such a sight as Agnes, Isobel, and Lucy now beheld lying on that bed. He thought of Abel, changed, wearied, and

worn ; but they saw the very ghost of Abel, swathed, as it might seem, in its winding sheet.

Abel refused all sustenance, and lay, almost without speaking a word, quite motionless on the bed. But warmth and rest were sustenance to him, and sleep was coming to his aid. The psalm was sung in a lower key, not to disturb him ; but he was yet awake ; and the voice of Lucy, like that of an angel from heaven, was singing to his ear forgiveness and peace. Laden with guilt, as was the wretched man, yet in our Father's house there are many mansions, all of them happier and more blessed than the most untroubled recesses of any earthly household.



CHAPTER XVII.

ALL anger, grief, hope, and despair, regarding his brother Abel, had long passed away from the heart of Michael Forester. And now, after fourteen years' absence, which had been looked on as the separation of the grave, the two brothers, who had always loved one another so well, slept with only a thin partition between their beds. Michael could hear his brother's disturbed breath during midnight. They sat again at the same board ; but Abel's mirth and merriment had long been at an end ; he scarcely ever opened his lips. Ingenious had he been with his cunning hands at all manner of work, out or in doors, making his very amusements contribute to his toil ; and then, in hours of perfect leisure, no musical instrument had ever come wrong to him ; he made them all discourse, and acquired skill was put to shame by native genius. But all these accomplishments, that had enlivened Dovenest for so many years, had long deserted their master ; the very remembrance of them no more abided in his brain ; all was weakened in his mind, or utterly decayed ; and it was plain to every one, that if Abel sur-

vived, nothing could restore the powers of his memory and intellect. But let Providence spare him even thus, and an asylum was prepared for him in his brother's house at Bracken Braes.

During the whole of April, and on towards the middle of May, Abel lost and regained strength of body every twenty-four hours. "Had he come a year earlier to us," often said Michael, "we could have saved his life." Nature within him struggled to survive, for the heart and the mind of the unfortunate man felt the change that had come over him, and would fain have remained among so many images of peace and repose, after such weary and rueful wanderings. Sometimes, now decently and comfortably clothed, he wandered by himself into the fields, with eyes still watching him, and sitting down on some sunny bank, remained for hours motionless, like a shepherd watching his flock. When in the warm afternoons the family took their meal beneath the plane tree, there Abel was seated among the rest; and, to a stranger's eye, his face betokened nothing distressing, nothing but a placid melancholy, for the features were still remarkably handsome, and preserved an expression of intelligence which was no longer within the mind. More than once since May-day, on which there had been a small festival, he had been observed to weep; and Agnes thought that a good symptom, for the tears seemed to flow on account of something that was fast coming more distinctly into his memory. And true it was, that Abel's mind gradually became less and less obscure. But as his faculties grew stronger, his bodily frame grew weaker and weaker; and finally, he asked leave to remain in his bed, saying, that he had heard a voice calling upon him from the other world, and that he wished to prepare himself for departure.

When it was seen that the bed on which Abel lay was soon to be a death-bed, there was not around it much outward demonstration of grief. It even seemed best that it should be so, for he had run his race, and sorely wearied indeed was he, now that he had reached the goal. Little — nothing could be done by skill — every thing he

desired by affection. The neighbors knew his state, and came no farther than the door. Mr. Kennedy alone crossed the threshold. Abel lingered in this way, suffering no sort of pain, but smitten motionless for several days, during which Michael never left his bedside. He gathered up each sentence — each word that the dying man articulated often at long intervals — and bound them together into affecting meanings. Both brothers were grateful to God for the wonderful restoration of Abel to his sound mind. It was impossible for any mortal man to be more truly penitent and contrite; and seeing around him nothing but countenances full of love and forgiveness, he could not but believe in the mercy of his Maker. All his knowledge of the Bible revived with his restored power of memory; and he was told, that, great as had been his sins, he might hope for the salvation Heaven offered to all believers. He seemed to hold his eyes fixed for a long time on Lucy, and then life left his lips so quietly, that it was not till his brother lifted up his hand that they perceived Abel was among them no longer. The silence of the house was rather more hushed than before — that was all — and they who had loved him so well, dried up their tears. Abel had been in foreign countries, and driven about the wide world by land and sea. They buried him in a quiet nook of the kirkyard of Holy-lee; and, before the next Sabbath, there was a stone at his head inscribed with his name and age. Rumors there had perhaps been among the firesides about the character of the dead man; but fifteen years bring oblivion even of great deeds and noble triumphs; and, except his own family, there was not one at Abel Forester's funeral who knew what he had either done or suffered.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN about a week after the funeral, Michael received a letter from England, the contents of which he immediately communicated to the family. Abel had told him, a few days before his death, that he had joined his wife, Julia Mansell, at Ambleside, soon after he had left Dove-nest; that she had died there in childbed; and that he, alarmed by the hue and cry that had pursued him even to that retired village, had fled to Liverpool, whence he had escaped as a soldier in a transport then sailing for the West Indies. This child, of whom he had never since heard, he left a few days old in the Poor House. Michael Forester had written to Mr. Colinson, the vicar of Ellesmere, whom Mr. Kennedy slightly knew, inquiring if anything could be heard of such an infant; and he had now received an answer, that "Scotch Martha," as she had been always called, was living, and servant to a cotter in his parish.

Nothing was ever done hastily, or without due pre-meditation, at Bracken Braes. Some communication, however, there must be made, and that right speedily, with this orphan girl. As the servant of a small cotter in the north of England, no doubt, "Scotch Martha" might very probably be, and continue to be very happy; but it was Michael Forester's duty, and his strong desire too, to know exactly the condition and character of his new found niece, and then to judge what ought to be done for her in future. What is there, thought Michael within himself, to prevent me from going to Ellesmere, and ascertaining precisely from Mr. Colinson, the vicar, what is my line of duty on this occasion. The resolution was no sooner suggested than formed. "I will take Agnes with me," exultingly said the blind husband aloud, "and see if, in all the houses of Westmoreland, Lancashire, or Cumberland, be they the houses of cotter, tenant, statesman, vicar, or esquire, there be any maid, wife, or widow to be compared with my own Agnes Hay."

When this plan was first laid before Aunt Isobel, she declared, most explicitly, that both Michael Forester and Agnes Hay were mad, and that such would be the opinion of the whole parish, if they were seen carrying it into effect. "You without your sight, my dear Michael, and my daughter there, delicate as a house lamb, to think of venturing by yourselves away into the woods, and lakes, and mountains, and wildernesses of a strange land! Order the lassie to come down here to Bracken Braes. Are not you her uncle, and has not the power of her dead father devolved into your hands? Order Scotch Martha down." But, ere long, Aunt Isobel began to see the matter in a somewhat different light, and to speak with less decision. "Why, my dear Aunt," said Michael, "would you grudge Agnes Hay one single marriage jaunt in fifteen years? I took her with me, on our marriage day from Sprinkeld to Dovenest — not a quarter of a mile, as you know — and from Dovenest I brought her to Bracken Braes, not very unlike a soldier's wife on a baggage-wagon — not above three or four times has my Agnes been as far as Lasswade to see her old friends there, for they have been good enough to visit me here — and you know how she has remained like a shadow by my side since that day in the Hirst Wood. Well, then, do you grudge her a jaunt to the land of the English lakes, which people say are so beautiful, and of which Agnes Hay has a soul to see the beauty — ay, to see it and feel it too, although she may use but few words, and these of a calm kind?" — "But, pity me, Michael, it's a long, long journey, my son; and are you sure our Agnes is able to bear it? If you think so, and if you will both be happy travelling together into merry England, then, Michael, all I say is, go — go, and God be with you till you come back to Bracken Braes."

Preparations were busily set a-going for their departure. Lucy had, at first, longed to accompany her parents into England. To the imagination of one who had never been more than eight or ten miles from home, that long travel seemed like an adventure in a tale. Fain would she have flown away from Bracken Braes, to that far off

country, on the wings of youth and joy, to return again, ere long, like a bird that, at evening, comes back from the cultivated valley to its moorland nest. But neither her father nor her mother had said a word about taking her with them; and besides, her heart told her that she must remain with Aunt Isobel. Reconciled, therefore, without one murmuring thought, to what could not well be called a disappointment, Lucy set herself, with all her heart and soul, to get every thing ready for the journey. Her needle had no rest from morning till night. Up with the lark was Lucy, and never down till after the night-hawk. Aunt Isobel was busier than any bee; while Agnes herself, who, in her gentleness and composure, seemed idle to unobserving eyes, sometimes was acknowledged, at the close of day, to have put through her quiet hands fully as much work as both together. For Aunt Isobel's fingers were but feeble, cheerful as was the old lady's talk; and Lucy was off her seat a hundred times a-day, looking for that which was not lost, undoing or doing over again what was already done, and, in the confusion of her happiness, making progress by many little circuitous paths, followed because they seemed to be so much shorter, so that sometimes she could not help laughing at her own mistakes, and, throwing down her work, would trip out into the sunshine, and observe whether the skies looked settled for fine weather during the journey to England.

Michael Forester had held several consultations with William Laidlaw, Mr. Kennedy, and Jacob Mayne, on all that was to be done about the farm during his absence. For, even to Michael, the prospect of being away perhaps a fortnight, or three weeks, was accompanied with some little anxiety. He had always considered himself absolutely necessary to all their ongoings about Bracken Braes. The very crops he almost feared would not grow after his departure; and he thought the sheep and lambs on the hill side would miss the blind man who used to walk quietly amongst them with his staff. But all these important arrangements were made; all orders, oral or written, delivered and understood; and now, by sunrise,

on a beautiful June morning, Mr. Kennedy's taxed cart was at the door, drawn too by his strong sober steed, and driven by Alexander Ainslie, one of the sons of the soldier's widow — an urchin who had been about horses from the time he could crawl, and although only fifteen, nevertheless an expert and cautious Jehu.

Lucy and Aunt Isobel accompanied the travellers to the very end of their own valley. As they passed the Manse, there were Mr. and Miss Kennedy to wish them, for the twentieth and last time, a happy parting and return; while the latter handed up to Agnes a basket full of choice viands, lest provisions should be scarce in the barren parts of England, through which she understood they were to pass; and Edward Ellis, who was going to angle, as he said, at any rate, down the stream, leapt up into the vehicle beside Lucy; and away drove Alexander the Great in his pride, amidst many gazing villagers. At Broomyside toll there was a parting, with a few tears and many smiles; Michael, Agnes, and Alexander, to distant Ambleside; Aunt Isobel, Lucy, and Edward Ellis, to near Bracken Braes.



CHAPTER XIX.

NOT a single adventure befell the humble travellers all the way from Bracken Braes to Ellesmere. The country through which they passed had not much beauty of any kind to boast of; yet Agnes, seated by the side of her husband, thought it often exceedingly beautiful, and described to him all she saw with affectionate animation. Michael Forester had, more than once, been in the north of England, and a few words from Agnes made him understand clearly where he was between stage and stage. He often turned his face towards the different scenes, in the vividness of recollection, and seemed just as much as

Agnes to enjoy the calm bright weather of June. There were several friends' houses by the way, where they received all due hospitality; and, after crossing the Border, the neat wayside inn, with its front white as snow, and sign hanging, perhaps, from the branch of an old elm tree, that stood in the circle before the porch, was cheerfully entered at the close of evening, and found to exhibit in its interior almost all the comfort, quietness, and regularity of a private dwelling. The equipage of our Scottish travellers was far from contemptible, to say nothing of their own appearance, which was such as to ensure respect everywhere; while their driver became more dexterous and dignified as they advanced into England; and would fain, on various occasions, have entered into competition with gigs and post chaises, which he could not see splashing by, without a flourish of his whip, betokening a sense of conscious superiority, were he to put Sampson on his mettle. The object of their journey was a right pleasant one, and they had left their home strong in its guarded innocence; so that there was something delightful to them both, thus to be at a distance from it, and their spirits rose almost to the level of those more youthful emotions of happiness that they had experienced at Dovenest, when not a cloud had passed over their wedded life, and when every sunrise had brought a new day of brighter or deeper enjoyment.

"Oh, beautiful indeed!" exclaimed Agnes, moved beyond her ordinary composure; "most beautiful!" when, from the hill of Orresthead, she beheld Windermere, and all her sylvan isles, lying, without one breath of air, beneath the sunlight and the blue marble firmament! What a depth of peace in that resplendent water! What quiet pastures encircling the small retired bays! Never before had her eyes fallen on such verdure as crowned these hanging groves, and woods that seemed to cover the hills even to their very summits! The houses, too, how sweetly hidden in hollows, or revealed on eminences rising over the little valleys, with here and there an old noble tree flinging a wide shadow over the open ground that lay covered with sunshine; all, apparently,

the dwellings of comfort and independence. Agnes then thought of Bracken Braes, and its solitary pastoral valley, where she knew almost every single bush, and every linn that murmured over its shelving rocks—the few houses too, from Raeshaw down to the Manse. Holylee seemed to be a reality—the scene before her a vision and a dream. But now a beautiful girl, about Lucy's age, passed by with a cheerful salutation, and the heart of Agnes leaped within her; for she knew that, at this very hour, Lucy and Isobel were sitting, according to their tryst, under the plane tree.

Michael Forester had long been perfectly happy in his blindness, and no more wished that he could see, than any other person wished to discern objects beyond the horizon; while Agnes, knowing his complete resignation, seldom or never felt very unhappy now for his sake. But, as they proceeded along the banks of Windermere, she could not help shedding a few tears for her husband. The beauty was of such a delightful kind, that as it entered into her spirit, she wept to know that it existed not for her Michael. Why should she gaze on that heavenly region in selfish and unpartaken delight? But her husband turned towards her with a smile and said—“Tell me when the lake is hidden by a wood, not unlike the Hirst, and with, here and there, a grove of larches, now, doubtless, grown into good trees since I saw them planted twenty years ago; for that is Calgarth, the abode of Watson, the defender of Christianity against the Infidel, and a name, therefore, venerated by the firesides over all our own Scotland. Humble people, like us, my Agnes, who pass by his gates, may well give a blessing on his venerable head, for he has secured to many a poor man his belief in his Bible, and that is bestowing charity on the human race.” Agnes wiped away the idle and transient tear; for what mattered it that woods, rocks, and lakes were all veiled from her husband's eyes, since, at all times, his soul could commune with solemn or cheerful thoughts; and, although deprived of the sight of men's earthly habitations, knew how to meditate on their immortal destinies!

As their journey was drawing near a close, Michael and Agnes began to feel a stronger interest in its object, and to converse earnestly about their orphan niece, to whom they were about to become parents. In that conversation, even Windermere had entirely escaped the notice of Agnes, and, on looking towards it once more, it was gone; and Alexander Ainslie had dismounted at the foot of a steep rocky hill, up which, he observed, it would be prudent for them all to walk. On descending the other side, they found themselves in a glen, and Agnes said to Michael that she suspected they were within half a mile of the Vicarage of Ellesmere.

The party from Scotland had been expected at the Vicarage the night before, and the vicar had now sauntered down the lane with his daughter Ruth, somewhat impatient for their arrival. He knew their character from Mr. Kennedy; but now that he beheld them, he could not help being struck with a feeling, even stronger than that of respect, on their very first appearance. 'There was an humble dignity in the demeanor of the blind man, that almost impressed Mr. Colinson with awe; while the beauty of his wife, which was no way impaired, only softened and shaded by years, and the perfectly lady like gentleness of her manner, came upon him altogether by surprise, for of that he had heard nothing from the good minister of Holylee. Greetings were interchanged; and, in a few minutes, Michael Forester and Agnes were introduced in due form to Mrs. Colinson, and seated in the Vicarage. What was its external appearance — how many windows it had in front — whether it were thatched or slated — had it a porch or no porch — whether it were sheltered by trees, or gave its roof to the sunshine — Agnes had been too attentive to their kind host to observe; only she thought there were high hawthorn hedges, with hollies intermixed all the way from the gate to the house, and that she had seen, close at hand, an enormous tree, which, from its barkless and involuted trunk, must surely be a yew of many centuries.

The best preparation had been made for mutual regard between those, who, in a very few hours, felt for one an-

other what may well be called friendship. It is not easy to tell what qualities of conversation are most winning or impressive in early intercourse, or why they are so — a few sentences often giving us a higher opinion of the speaker's moral and intellectual powers, than any sentiment contained in them would seem altogether to justify; while frequently most excellent talk fails to make us esteem very highly the person exhibiting himself, and leaves us in the belief of his being, after all, but an ordinary, and in no way very delightful character. Long before sunset, all hearts within the Vicarage were touched with the kindest impressions, and Michael felt proud in the conviction that his Agnes was already loved and admired by the whole family. Of himself he did not think; but Mr. Colinson, who was merely a sensible and good man, without any pretensions to scholarship or talents, was much affected by the blind man's superior character, and listened with more than respect to the plain eloquence of his speech, for it deserved no other name, and to the strength and soundness of all the thoughts that came from him, with that easy and natural flow peculiar to minds familiarized to early habits of reflection. The vicar had a son, too, just arrived from Cambridge, where he was a student of two years' standing; and the intelligent and well informed youth perceived that, even in his own scholastic acquirements, he might not be greatly superior to this Scottish peasant. But this was not Michael's thought, for he lightly esteemed the little knowledge he had been able to acquire in youth, and to retain without loss in his blind years; and he doubted not that, in a few days, he would receive much instruction from the Cambridge scholar.

Just before twilight, "Scotch Martha," who had been sent for to a cottage about two miles distant, came to the Vicarage. Agnes saw in a moment that her features bore a certain resemblance to those of Abel. The greatest kindness was shewn to the orphan, but there was no extravagant display of feeling; for Martha seemed cheerful and contented enough — was apparently in good health — and did not exhibit much emotion in her first interview

with her relations. Her manner, however, was simple and pretty enough as she dropped Agnes a courtesy — a smile was in her eyes that shone with something of the same keen light that had belonged to her father's — and although her dialect was not wholly intelligible at first, either to Michael or Agnes, yet there was a kindliness in the tone of her voice that was pleasant, and seemed to bespeak a character of cheerfulness, alacrity, and contentment. To the question, if she thought she would like to go to Scotland, Martha answered instantly, with little or no thought, that she would like it very well — for the young creature had no very strong or tender ties to bind her to her present place, and was plainly not only willing, but eager to go any where, however far off, with those who addressed her so affectionately, and whose very appearance assured her, inexperienced and ignorant as she was, that they were good people. Besides, had they not come from a distant country merely to see her — a poor orphan? And was not she about to have a father and a mother?

Never, during all their fifteen years of wedded life, had Michael Forester and his Agnes lain down to rest more perfectly happy than they did this night at the Vicarage of Ellesmere.

CHAPTER XX.

THE vicar and his wife soon made their visitors acquainted with the history of their niece. Poor Scotch Martha had passed the first eight years of her life in the Poor House of Ambleside; a miserable establishment indeed, where little attention was paid either to the bodily or mental wants of the paupers, and where idleness, vice, and disease were seen in their most squalid and loathsome union. The child had been removed from all this wretch-

edness into a cotton mill, where she was bound an apprentice; but the bankruptcy of the proprietor liberated her, along with many other pining pale-faced creatures, after two years' imprisonment; and Scotch Martha then became the sole servant of a very poor couple, carriers between Ambleside and Hawkshead. In that hard but healthy service she had now been four years, with very small wages, no doubt, and scanty fare; yet the pure airs of heaven had been constantly blowing about her; and the orphan, for whom few or none greatly cared, had, notwithstanding, been happy in the quick and strong spirit of youth, which is in itself happiness, and so tenacious of life, that it will not be stifled but in the very grave. To have been reduced to such a condition as that of poor Martha, would have broken the heart of many a child; but Martha had never known a better, and was reconciled to all its hardships and privations. She had been always accustomed to much indifference or neglect, for she was alone in the little world in which she lived; and while every one else had brothers, or sisters, or near relations, Martha had none; and also knew indistinctly, although without pain, that there was meanness or shame in her birth. Yet nature had not suffered her heart to be very sorely depressed. Some kind attentions she met with occasionally, and these she treasured up in her memory with a keenness of gratitude proportioned to the rarity of their occurrence, often repaying the slightest civilities by the warmest affection, and looking on those as her friends who had only perhaps spoken kindly to the orphan on the road, or on the footpaths, as she was bringing fuel from the wood or moss. The old couple, in whose service she lived, were extremely poor, and wholly uneducated. Their sole endeavor of mind and body, in this world, was to subsist. They were by no means without religion; but it was a religion received passively — its usages observed decently from long custom, and even so observed not without a blessing — while their knowledge of the Bible, as neither of them could read, was imperfect and confused, and had been, previous to the time Martha came to live with them, acquired

entirely from the church service. Martha herself had been at the free school for a month at a time, now and then, when she could be spared from her work ; but her education had been small indeed, and, in that slavish condition, there was no time for reading any book. Yet on the Sundays, when dressed in coarse clean garments, and mingling with decent people at church, the hard working and neglected orphan, no doubt, felt something of the sacred influence of Divine worship ; and every month, as she was growing up to womanhood, had learned unconsciously more and more of her duty to her Maker. The misery and vice which her eyes had been made to witness during too long a childhood, were all utterly forgotten ; and narrow as the sphere now was of her thoughts and feelings, Scotch Martha was at least a harmless creature, and, under such tendance as she was now about to receive, likely enough to turn out an amiable and intelligent young woman.

Michael Forester lost no time in settling matters with the cotter in whose service Martha lived ; and it was agreed that, after their small harvest, which would be over in a week or so, and a few other trifling matters, she should accompany her relations to Scotland. So Martha continued, without any unnecessary visits of interruption, at her usual toils, the severest of which were now light in the foreknowledge of a speedy termination to her servitude. She was already quite a changed creature — bolder and more free in all her looks, smiles, and motions — the chains she now wore galled not at all, for in a few days they were to be thrown aside, and she herself to be taken as a daughter into her uncle's family. Yet long habit had attached her even to that severe and solitary life, and she now and then could almost have sighed to think that she and the old people were in a few days to part probably for ever. Cheerfulness and joy, however, were Martha's chief companions now — and she longed to be in Scotland, of which she had read in those songs and ballads that spread through adjacent countries a certain knowledge of each other's customs and character, and, true as they often are to nature, are

felt and understood among all the varieties and differences of provincial life. It was soon known too that Scotch Martha was come of a respectable family; and all the neighbors round were pleased that so industrious and harmless a girl should have been so providentially rescued from the uncertain evils of an orphan condition.

Martha had not many leisure hours during any season, and this was with her, perhaps, the busiest time of all the year. Yet, now that she and the old people were to part, she must leave them a few keepsakes, that the sight of the trifles might sometimes recall to their minds her who had shared their poverty. Out of her "sair won penny fee," she purchased a few articles of wearing apparel, and sat up an hour or two longer after her work to leave them fit for use at her departure. On looking back over the four years she had lived in their hut, nothing rose to her recollection but their small kindnesses, and her own most cheerful hours—their anger, or neglect, or severity, were all forgotten. They were both too exceedingly old—not much less than fourscore—and, perhaps, their next servant would not be so attentive to them as she had been, and leave more hardships on their age. Martha knew that she was going to live with her own relations, and could want nothing; and, therefore, besides those keepsakes, she determined to give the old people back her last half year's wages. As her necessities disappeared, the orphan felt her nature becoming every day more kindly; and she began to do what she had never done before, to look with the pleasure of hope into the years yet to come, and to feel that Providence, perhaps, intended her for a life of happiness.

CHAPTER XXI.

MICHAEL and Agnes were now positively domesticated at the Vicarage. They had become perfectly acquainted with the ways of the family; and quiet, regular, industrious, and not inelegant ways they were, admirably adapted to preserve that competence which the inmates knew so well how to enjoy. Agnes described to her husband, when they were alone, all the beauties of the habitation; its slate roof, with so many irregularities, which were all seen, on the slightest attention, to have each a meaning, use, and character of its own; the tall round chimneys, surmounted with the blast-breaking slate flags, and rising up almost fantastically through embowering trees; the porch, itself a parlor, with its niche seats, and outwardly overgrown with roses and jessamines; the hollies and laurels, glittering among the other shrubs, whose beauty lay more in their flowers than leaves; the smooth-shorn circular lawn in front, with its central dial-stone; that prodigious yew, under whose shadow the kine were milked; the stately elm grove, with its rookery — a pleasant din; the tops of woods, seen in the distance, and the soft blue misty light, floating all between the meadows belonging to the Vicarage, and the rocky, or verdant mountains, that encircled the glen, and shewed a different outline, under the changes of the atmosphere, many hundred times between the morning and evening sun. Michael knew the scene, from his wife's description, almost as well as if he saw it; and, with a smile, said, he hoped Agnes would not forget Bracken Braes.

They were not allowed to forget any one thing they had left, for Lucy, although she had never written a letter in her life before, now sent them long despatches, full of news, about all that was stirring in the parish. These epistles, written in the true conversational style, when read to Michael, brought Lucy close to his side; and as they contained no secrets, they were given to the

perusal of the whole family, one after the other; for Agnes was proud of her Lucy's accomplishments as a penwoman, nor had she any reason to be ashamed of the natural strain of sentiment that ran through them from beginning to end. "Our Lucy, Mrs. Colinson, had the best education, I may say, from the time she could speak, for her father taught her everything himself, before it had pleased God to take away his sight; and ever since syne she has been constantly about his knees; so you may all ken what advantage our Lucy has had above any other girl of her age."

Only a fortnight or three weeks ago, and those now so affectionately disposed towards one another, and so happy in each other's society, had been mutually ignorant of the existence of the two families! Why need friendship, although a sacred plant, be of slow growth? No doubt its flowers are not all disclosed, but under the influence of tears, which are to it like the evening dews; and if tears were all that were wanting to the friendship of the Foresters and Colinsons, they were soon supplied; for Agnes had been unwell for a couple of days — having exposed herself, it was thought, too much to the mid-day sun, observing the merry work in the hay field — and now lay in a low but oppressive fever, of which the symptoms became daily more alarming, till her medical attendant, Mr. Ianson, at last pronounced her to be in imminent danger.

At the beginning of his wife's illness, Michael Forester had behaved with that calmness and composure accordant with his character. But no sooner had Mr. Colinson intimated to him something of the truth, than it seemed as if he had spoken to a different man. That grave and resigned demeanor was in a moment changed into the wildest distraction. While his features grew rigid in his agony, he clasped his hands together, and, turning his sightless countenance towards heaven, he uttered a short prayer for mercy. The big tears rolled down his cheeks, and he groaned aloud without any restraint. It was not possible for any human heart but his own to know what his love was to his Agnes. It had pleased God to destroy

his eyesight, but even the first troubled days of that affliction had been calmed by the piety of his wife. Love, affection, gratitude, and reverence towards her, had been accumulating in his heart for several dark years, till now Agnes was to him the being that kept in care its very pulses, and without whom it would cease to beat. Was Agnes indeed to die? "Dreadful are thy judgments, O Lord!" And the strong man fell down upon his face, deprived of sense and speech. When he awoke to a sense of the condition of Agnes, that fit of passion was in no [degree abated. Religion itself gave him no power over his misery, and he confessed to them all that his spirit was in rebellion against God, and could not submit to his terrible decrees. Where, now, was the merit of all his previous resignation? Joy and delight had been graciously infused with all its former trials; and no wonder that he had borne them without much murmuring or impatience. But now it was to be tried, whether or not Michael Forester, with all his virtue and all his faith, was willing to acknowledge the supremacy of his Maker, or to lift up a brow of despair, which is only another word for helpless anger, towards the heavens, now black with mortal judgment! At that hour his soul was weighed in the balance, and found wanting; for he thought that he might now take the evil advice offered to the man of Uz — curse God and die. Unhappy mortals! whose best affections lead to disobedience of the commands of Him who gave them for a blessing in this vale of tears! Happy mortals! who may come to know that even into the deepest wounds those affections can suffer, there is a divine hand that can pour a balm that flows in the fountains of heaven!

CHAPTER XXII.

CHEERFULNESS and tranquillity had reigned in and about the house of Bracken Braes during the whole month of June. The spirit of Michael Forester had seemed to preside during his absence; and for the first week after the departure of her parents, not unfrequently had Lucy looked up when a shadow came to the door, half forgetful that her father was away, and expecting to see him enter and lay down his staff. Loud and merry was the murmur of the plane tree, where the hill and the hive bees met in multitudes, regardless of each other among the honey dew; and Aunt Isobel and Lucy, according to agreement, sat below it at stated times every day, that Michael and Agnes, when far off, might think they beheld them in that pleasant shadow. Oftener, perhaps, than usual did Edward Ellis come now to the house; at least so thought Aunt Isobel; and, indeed, he could not otherwise see Lucy, for many were the injunctions her mother had given her never to leave the old lady long by herself, and the affectionate creature never cared to go out of the gate at the end of the avenue.

“You never go now to the linn, my dear Lucy; perhaps, for anything you know, the howlet’s nest is gone. What would you say to find the old yew destroyed, and all its bright ivy? Do, sweet Lucy, take a walk down there to-morrow evening; you can easily make an errand to the Manse; nay, I will tell a white lie, and say to Aunt Isobel that Miss Kennedy wishes you to drink tea there. Mind now, my beloved Lucy — do not make me unhappy — I will not leave the linn till the first star. But there comes that everlasting Aunt Isobel.” Slight as was the fault of that stealthy assignation — which, indeed, Lucy had not, except by her silence, agreed to hold; she felt as if detected in doing something wrong when Aunt Isobel looked into her face, and, no doubt, saw its beauty overspread with many innocent blushes. Edward

Ellis felt he had spoken a little disrespectfully of the good old lady, and set himself to make amends by his pleasantest courtesies. There was a charm in the graceful boy's manners, which were never lost on any one, young or old, below that roof; and when he rose to go, Aunt Isobel even pressed his stay. But Edward, giving one anxious and hopeful look to Lucy, took his fishing rod, and disappeared.

When to-morrow evening came, great was the struggle in Lucy's mind whether to go or not to go to the linn. She remembered the serious injunctions of both her parents never to leave Aunt Isobel in the house by herself; but the white lie had been told; the long summer evening was wavering by, dewy and calm; that sun, which in another hour or so would be setting, was indeed a golden sun, and so were the clouds that lay over the golden sky; the stream, as it went gliding on towards the linn, seemed to murmur on her to accompany the music along its banks; and she thought of Edward Ellis, leaning, perhaps, at that very moment against the yew tree, and almost angry at her non-arrival. "Surely there can be no great harm," thought Lucy, "in my just going to tell him not to wait any longer, and singing to him, 'Auld Langsyne,' or the 'Flowers o' the Forest.'" So Lucy put on her bonnet, feeling, notwithstanding her slight disobedience, that while she loved Edward Ellis, her affection would only be for a month or a year, when he would be gone for ever; but that she belonged, indeed, to her father and her mother, and would live with them, contented and happy, all the days of her life.

She was standing at the door, looking at the sun, that now shone right over the Cairn Craig, when, to her surprise, there were Mr. Kennedy and Edward Ellis coming up the avenue. They bade her good evening, with more serious looks than she had ever observed before; and her heart sunk, she knew not why, in an indistinct foreboding of some evil. Mr. Kennedy immediately began to speak to Aunt Isobel about their distant friends, and, opening a letter which he said he had just received from Mr. Colinson, informed them that Agnes was far from being

well; indeed, that she had a fever, and that her husband, not without reason, was unhappy for her sake. He then read the letter aloud; and Lucy could not but know that the life of her mother was in danger. She heard it with a pang of conscience; and in spite of Mr. Kennedy's calm voice, and hopeful expression of countenance, wept in a fit of fear, pity, and grief. "Nay, nay, Lucy, do not weep so," said Edward Ellis, with a cheering tone; "the fevers in that country are sharp and severe, but not dangerous — not often fatal. Your mother is in God's hands; and do not fear, Lucy, but that she will recover." But every comfort was wasted upon the terrified child; and she looked in vain for encouragement to Aunt Isobel, whose face had undergone a dark change. Mr. Kennedy and Edward remained about an hour in the house; and Lucy, who accompanied them a little way down the vale, whispered to the latter, with a sob — "O Mr. Ellis, Mr. Ellis! can you meet me to-night, at twelve o'clock — ay, at midnight — at the linn?" and she retired weeping to the house.

Aunt Isobel did all that affection and pity could do to comfort Lucy, but all in vain: they were able, indeed, to say the evening prayer, but it was with sore distress; and they at last retired to their beds. "You had better sleep with me to-night, my dear bairn;" but Lucy said she would rather lie in her mother's bed, as she had done since they went away; and that Aunt Isobel need not come to her during the night, unless she called upon her; so, by the dim summer light, each went to her own room. But no sooner was everything still in Aunt Isobel's room, than Lucy, who had never undressed herself, rose silently as a ghost, and, taking a few garments in her basket, stole out of the house.

Truer than any maiden to the trysting hour was Lucy at the linn; but there Edward Ellis was before her, and received the weeping girl with all the soothing fondness of a brother. "Oh! now, the time has come, Mr. Ellis, when you can prove if you have any kindness for poor Lucy Forester. My mother is dying far away, and my blind father is at her death-bed. Ever good to us all

have you been ; and now, I beseech you, in the name of the great merciful God, and the Son of God, that you will help me to get to the place where my parents are, far off although it be — mair, indeed, they say than a hundred miles." Edward stood in amazement and said nothing. " O sir ! if your ain father were dying, you wouldna long be here ; and, puir ignorant creature as I am, you cannot love your parents better than I do mine ; so, tell me — tell me how to get to England, and I will pray for you to Heaven, morning and night, as long as I am in life." And Lucy dropped upon her knees, and held up to him her clasped hands in an agony of supplication.

Edward Ellis tried to raise her gently from her kneeling posture ; but Lucy seemed rooted to the ground. Then, lifting her eyes to heaven, she said, with a calmer and clearer voice — " O Thou that dwellest far above the moon and stars, take pity on me, and save my mother from death ! " and, in the hush of the great heavens, it seemed as if the child heard a merciful response given to her prayer.

" There will be no darkness to-night, Lucy ; for to-day was the longest day in all the year, and the morning will soon come upon the moon and stars. Cheer up, my sweetest one ; and brother and sister as we are, we two will travel southwards together through the openings between the hills." Away they went, side by side, over bank and brae ; and Edward Ellis, who, as a sportsman, knew all the hill country well, to the very English Border, determined to lead Lucy to the point where he knew, at a stated hour, a conveyance would be found for her to Penrith. No weariness affected her limbs ; the passion of grief carried her lightly over the hags in the moss — over the stony torrents — and the steep heathery hills ; no more tired than a fawn feeding during the night hours ; and, at sunrise, many a clouded mountain lay between her and Bracken Braes. She, poor fugitive, felt now that she had made her escape from Aunt Isobel, who never would have suffered her to go, and that she was indeed on the way to her dying mother. Even hope

began to rise with the bright morning light; and as her feet brushed yet unfaltering over the dews, she faintly smiled in the face of her guide; and, in her gratitude to him, felt almost an assurance that her mother would yet recover.

They sat down together on the turf, beside a hill-side spring; and Lucy needed no other refreshment than a little of that purest water. But Edward left her for a few minutes, and, running to a hut on the edge of a birk cop-pice, came back with some barley bread. "You may rest yourself here, Lucy, for an hour or two, or even three, if you choose, for we shall even then be in good time at the inn, on the great north road; and I will not leave you till I see you in safe hands." Lucy put her trust in him, just as if he had been an angel whom she had seen come down from the sky. Her plaid had been brought with her; the noble-hearted boy folded her up in it with gentle hands, and made her lie down by his side below the shadow of a gray mossy rock, that, like a canopy, covered a bed of smoothest herbage. Lucy, although she had not known it, was wearied with her flight of more than twenty long Scottish miles, and fell asleep with her hand laid in its innocence almost upon her benefactor's breast. Edward put aside the golden ringlets and kissed her forehead, and then he too fell into a slumber, but still conscious that his arm was over Lucy Forester.

In an hour or two Lucy awoke, and, starting to her feet, looked round as in a dream. But the thought of her mother made all plain at once: over moss and muir they again pursued their journey, and in good time reached the place where their walk was to terminate. Lucy received her instructions from Edward, who knew well — boy as he was — all the lake land; and she put his memorandum book into her bosom. "I will get back to the Manse before night, Lucy, if I should have to hire a horse out of the work field. What will the good people at Holylee and Bracken Braes be thinking has become of us?" — "I left a slip of paper in Aunt Isobel's Bible, telling what I intended to do, and begging her forgive-

ness; and there she would be sure to find it at six o'clock this morning."

No less magnificent a vehicle than his Majesty's mail now drove up in style; and while the horses were baiting, Edward Ellis looked in, and beheld two persons asleep, and two half awake. He opened the door, and, without ceremony, lifted Lucy up; but strong opposition was declared by the most pompous of the somnolent gentlemen, thus disturbed, in his ideal world, by the intrusion of a human face like that of Lucy Forester. An old-maidenish lady, with a somewhat sour expression, seemed disposed to join the leader of the opposition; but first looking at Edward Ellis, and then at Lucy, her features relaxed into a benevolent smile, and she seemed willing to endeavor to make room for them both. A young man, in a naval uniform, stopped the fat's whig's mouth with a harmless nautical oath; and Edward Ellis committed Lucy to his care. "Ay — ay — young gentleman — I will see her safe to harbor, whether sister or sweetheart." Edward knew Lucy was safe, and had just time to shake hands with the tar, who bore bravery and kindness in his weather-beaten countenance, when the guard sounded his bugle; and off flew Lucy Forester of Bracken Braes, in a carriage drawn by four blood horses.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Lucy had been committed to the charge of a man who would have gone through fire and water — nay, who had done so — nor thought anything of danger, to save the life of a human creature in jeopardy. Mr. Marshall was a lieutenant in the navy, and his ship having come into Leith Harbor, for repair of damages sustained in a gale in the North Seas, he had taken the opportunity of wheeling off for a week to his father's house on the banks of Ullswater. He soon heard poor Lucy's story; and having

learned the value of home feelings on the great deep, he felt the strongest compassion for his pretty little friend, and did all he could to assuage her affliction. Lucy felt as if the whole world were kind to her, and allowed herself to believe in the offered comfort. In a few hours she could even listen with interest to Mr. Marshall's stories about the sea; and, once or twice, almost joined in the laughter of the other passengers, when the jolly tar became amusing in his anecdotes. Old maids do not in general stand high in public estimation, on the score either of urbanity or tender-heartedness; but this may be a popular delusion, and certainly, in the present case, Lucy had good cause to love the sisterhood; for this elderly Preston spinstress was as tender towards her as if she herself had been the happy mother of many children; and on parting with her at Penrith, late in the evening, when Lucy was to leave the coach, gave her the present of an English Prayer Book, inscribed hastily with both their names — "Lætitia Bairstow, to Lucy Forester: God have her always in his holy keeping."

Lucy showed Mr. Marshall the instructions she had received from Edward Ellis. "All right — all right — my bonny lassie; but you are not afraid, are you, to trust yourself with me?" — "No, sir; I will trust myself entirely to so good a man. You know where I am going, and from where I have come. Oh sir! you ken that my heart is fu' o' grief, and that I want sair to see my mother — can you contrive to send me on to Ellesmere, and my father will be sure to pay the expense, for I am awa' without siller, and neither did Mr. Ellis remember." The lieutenant put his hand kindly on her shoulder, and Lucy was silent. In a couple of hours Lucy Forester found herself in Seathwaite Hall — an old mansion on the banks of Ullswater — in a drawing-room, surrounded by young ladies, who, after embracing joyfully their gallant brother, bestowed their wondering and admiring kindness upon his beautiful charge. It was late in the night; and except those three hours' slumber by the spring on the hill side in Scotland Lucy had had no sleep since the early morn of yesterday. She was conducted to the prettiest

bed, in the prettiest room she had ever seen, by a young lady only a little older than herself, and who kissed her on saying good-night; and before Lieutenant Marshall had been able to satisfy the curiosity of his sisters about the beautiful Scottish maiden, Lucy was in a profound sleep.

Nature had given Lucy Forester into the arms of sleep, but all the while the child lay dreaming, there was a resolution kept mysteriously within her heart, that she would awake at sunrise; for her filial sorrow was not dead in that slumber, and it awoke her like a little knell at the time her heart had fixed. She opened the shutter, and looked timidly out upon a broad bright bay that glittered in the sunlight, shaded from the opposite shore by a grove of huge forest trees. Lucy thought herself in another world. Several men were standing beside a boat — the first she had ever seen, except in pictures; and there was Lieutenant Marshall, whose loud cheerful laugh was heard from the water side. As she stood considering how she could join the party, the pretty creature, who had taken her to the bedroom last night, came in dressed almost as plainly as herself, and conducted her to the parlor. Breakfast over, Agatha Marshall accompanied her down to the lake side, and leaped into the pinnace. Lucy followed in wonder; but she saw the lieutenant at the helm. The snow-white sail was hoisted and unfurled, and a breeze coming with a rustle down Glencoin, away went the Naïad of Ullswater, and, before a word was spoken, had rounded the green point of the bay, and was out of sight of her anchorage.

Agatha held Lucy by the hand; and, as the Naïad stooped her gunwale in the wreathed foam that flowed like a waterfall away from her prow, told her, with a smile, not to be afraid. Friends of an hour — there they sat like sisters that had lived together from their birth. Lucy, oppressed as her heart was, and sorely troubled, could not help seeing, with the stealing delight of wonder, the wooded cliffs that seemed to shoot across the water and block up their way, and then slowly to recede, leaving nothing but the merry multitude of waves. Were

these rocks, she thought, or were they old castles and churches hidden among the trees or the clouds? But Lucy would then close her eyes, for she felt them filling with tears, as she figured to herself the bed where her blind father might be standing to witness her mother die. "Let go the main-sheet," cried the lieutenant; and, after a moment's bustle, they were all standing in a green meadow, beside a bank of willows. "You are now at Patterdale, Lucy; and here I and Agatha must bid you farewell. It is not often I see the old gentleman, and I must not be away at the breakfast table the first morning I am at home." Lucy would not hear of a guide. Mr. Marshall knew there was no fear of her missing the way over Kirkstone; the day was fine; so away danced the homeward-bound Naiad, with Agatha waving a signal from the stern; and Lucy, after gazing a little while, turned her towards the great mountains.

Lucy had never been one moment utterly alone since she heard of her mother's illness. But now, in a short time, there was no human being near her in the solitude. House after house had disappeared, and now there was nothing but rocks and sky. These were not like the hills about Bracken Braes; and the child felt awed in the desert. She sat down on the ledge of a bridge, across a small rivulet that crossed that wild road, and opened the book given to her by that unknown lady. "God have her always in his holy keeping." She lifted her eyes from these words, and saw the lambs running races upon the scanty green plats among the rocks; the air was filled with murmuring insects; and a little bright bird, of a kind she had never seen before, kept playing his pretty gambols on the very ledge where she was sitting, as if for her amusement, and then began to trim his yellow and crimson plumage. Every creature seemed happy, and why might not she at least hope? She read over and over again all Edward Ellis' kind instructions, and hoped that God would bless him all the days of his life.

The young pilgrim was just about to rise and pursue her journey up the toilsome mountain, when two or three

big drops of rain fell on the blue-slate coping of the bridge, and the dust of the road seemed in an instant sultrier. That narrow desert place was darkened between its fearful rocks; and she knew, from the sudden grimness of the heaven, that there was going to be a thunder-storm. Ever since that fatal day in the Hirst wood, her heart had quaked at the most distant growl of the element.

A number of large stones, confusedly hanging over each other, afforded various places of shelter; and Lucy, to avoid the rain that now came down in torrents, and to lose sight of the flashes, crept into one of them, and endeavored to hide herself from the thunder. There she lay with a quaking heart, while sometimes the thunder crash seemed to shake the pillars of her prison. Looking out with a hurried glance, during a cessation of the peals, she saw the tall figure of a man indistinctly moving through the mist; and the sight of a human being in that awful solitude brought her out from her concealment. Pale and speechless, and trembling with fear, and the coldness of that wet dungeon, Lucy stood before him in the attitude of a suppliant. In a little while she told her story; and the old shepherd, who had been descending into Patterdale, turned back, and said he would see her safe into the vale of Ambleside. The hurricane still continued; but Lucy forgot all her fears, for the shepherd wore a calm and cheerful countenance, and told her that, in an hour at farthest, all would be peace and sunshine. He had heard, too, of the Scotch people at the Vicarage of Ellesmere, and assured Lucy that her mother must have been alive the night before, as he had been in a house in that vale, and had heard the family talking of her illness. At these words Lucy heard not the dying voice of the thunder, nor observed the water courses that were traversing the road down that mountain pass. She kept close to the side of the old grave shepherd, whose words were few, but every one of which sounded sweeter than any music. "Noo, my li'le lass, that's Ammleside; ye canna gae wrang; so God be wi' you, and may ye find your puir mother in life."

Lucy was once more alone ; but her guide had left her with a strengthened heart, and in a place where it was not possible to be very melancholy. For the short summer storm was over and gone, and the valley below her literally swam in light, as the sun, no longer obscured by the black clouds that were fading in every direction, illuminated the woods, and meadows, and the winding waters of the Rothay. The blue roofs of the village, embowered in trees, sent a cheerful feeling into Lucy's heart as she passed by the gate of a building, which, with its dialled tower, she knew to be a church ; and crowds of haymakers seen returning into every field after the rain, made her at once forget the solitary region, where she had been overtaken in the storm. There was no danger of losing her way now ; and, with almost a spirit of cheerfulness, Lucy dropped like a bird into the valley of Ambleside.



CHAPTER XXIV.

THERE had been a thunder storm for several hours among the mountains of Coniston and Langdale, where the clouds lay heaviest and blackest ; and now it had reached Ellesmere, and was raging above the Vicarage. The windows of the room in which Agnes lay in her fever had been left open, behind the half closed shutters, that a wandering breath of air might haply come down from some one of the little glens, to relieve the oppressive sultriness of the atmosphere. As the thunder went rattling over the roof, and the flashes of lightning gleamed across the darkened room, Agnes was wholly insensible to the strife, and, although not asleep, returned no answer to the kind words of inquiry which now and then the watchers by her bedside ventured to whisper in their anxiety. In the intervals of silence, the many mountain

torrents were heard sounding on all sides ; for there had been a deluge of rain at their sources, and every hill side shewed a number of cataracts. Michael Forester heard none of these sounds. His wife's hand was between both of his ; and while at one time he seemed to be counting the pulses, at another he listened to her breathing, as if life or death were in each successive sigh. He was terrified lest those fitful pantings should all at once be mute, and forever. So long as he heard that breath, to him all the outward tumult was as silence.

The vicar, and indeed the whole family, had nearly given up all hope of Mrs. Forester's recovery. A fatal crisis seemed to be at hand ; and, as if each person read in the other's eyes an intimation that they ought all to leave the room, one by one they began to do so, and at last none were left there with the dying person but Mr. Ianson and her husband. The family collected themselves together in the large room below, and there they sat, not without sobbing and tears, fearing every moment to see Mr. Ianson coming down stairs, with a countenance telling that all was over. And thus they had sat nearly an hour — the storm was hushed — and sunshine was again struggling through the gloom, and finding its way through the lead latticed window to the floor of the room where they had been sitting so dark and silent. The swallows were beginning to twitter without, and nature slowly to reassume her customary cheerfulness and tranquillity. The door opened, and a stranger girl, stepping timidly across the floor, asked eagerly — “Is this Mr. Colinson's, the vicar of Ellesmere? Oh sir, I am the daughter of Michael Forester and Agnes Hay, and my name is Lucy. Is my mother in the land o' the living !”

Many kind tongues, and eyes, and hands, were soon comforting the dutiful daughter ; but Lucy heard nothing but that her mother was not dead. “Oh ! surely you are not deceiving me ; and yet, why are you all weeping so ? Where is my father — perhaps he too is gone — and God's judgments more terrible than I can bear ? Here am I, a' the way frae Scotland, come to pray by my

mother's bedside; and God has brought me here unharmed, by means o' the kind hands o' my fellow creatures, who all helped me on towards this house, so far away from Bracken Braes, where we live! O my bonnie lassie! tell me — tell me — if my mother is indeed likely to live!" Ruth Colinson felt her own hopes strengthened by the passionate earnestness of this appeal, and said, with a faint smile, to Lucy, that her mother had not been any worse since the morning, and that, perhaps, the danger might be past. Just then Mr. Ianson came down stairs, and there was no fatal expression in his countenance, so Ruth once more assured her that there was hope. Then Lucy sat down and cried bitterly, as if her heart would break.

At such a time there was no need of deception or concealment. None knew how God was dealing with her in the room above; but here was the creature dearest to her on this earth, brought to her bedside as by a prayer. So they led Lucy to the sick-room; and in a moment, with every sob hushed, she was on her knees, at her mother's bedside, with her forehead resting upon the hands of her father.

The mind of Agnes had been wandering for some time; and the fever had caused many afflicting dreams. "Poor Lucy! drowned in that black marl pit. Merciful God! see her — see her clinging to a branch! What can a blind father do to save his child? Oh, what shrieks! what shrieks!" Michael turned his sightless countenance towards Mr. Ianson, as if he looked for comfort. In the agony of his despair, he believed that in medical knowledge lay a foresight of futurity, and he felt as if even the issues of life and of death were committed to his mortal hands. "O father, father! I your daughter, Lucy, am here. Put your hand upon my head, and know; my mother's face is not so changed as I thought; and she will live — will live — and go back with us, under the mercy of the Almighty, to Bracken Braes." Michael Forester sat for a few moments mute and motionless; and then he, too, knelt down by the

bedside of Agnes, and laid his cheek on Lucy's head, the touch of whose hair, wet as it was with the rains, and sorely dishevelled, was familiar to the yearnings of his inmost heart, and calmed in some measure the severity of his protracted passion.

Agnes started up in one of those sudden fits of disordered strength, that in a fever often come upon the apparent prostration of all vital power, and opening her eyes for the first time during twenty-four hours, fixed them upon Lucy, who by this time had risen from her knees, and was standing by the bedside. Perhaps the sound of that voice had been recognised in the seeming deafness of her spirit. Ever and anon she averted, and then again cast her eyes, with a bewildered eagerness, upon her daughter, till at last she stretched forth her arms, and with a face expressing the most passionate fondness, but nothing else, drew Lucy to her bosom, and kissing her with a thousand kisses, fell back on her pillow. Lucy, in that embrace, had crept into the lowly bed; and there she lay by her mother's side, both mute, and, to all who looked upon them, beautiful as in the happiest sleep.

Now that Michael had been permitted to reflect on the wonderful appearance of Lucy at the Vicarage, and then had been told by Mr. Colinson of the nature of her journey, he could not help feeling that the mother of such a child would be spared even for her sake. He had for several days and nights past thought of Lucy as an orphan. In his dreams he had seen her weeping in sore distress, and she would not be comforted. For in all his dreams, Michael saw still the objects of his affection; and indeed there was no blindness in that imaginary world. Now God, and God only, had sent Lucy to restore her mother to life. "Impossible, impossible, that our child has been brought hither only to see her mother die! Hush—hush: they have both fallen asleep; and Agnes' breathing, methinks, is assuredly more free and more composed."—"I am not asleep, father, but my mother is; and, O, I beseech you all, here let me lie till she awakes."

The fever in which her mother lay might be infectious ; but Lucy never thought of that, nor perhaps did any one then present ; for, in such extremities, prudence is not known to love, and all fear is for the dying. Without any clearly understood reason for it, every heart now began to hope. The vicar walked out into his orchard ; Ruth looked after some little household duty with noiseless steps ; and Mrs. Colinson prepared some refreshment for Mr. Ianson, who now appeared in the lower room, and said that there certainly seemed a decided change for the better in the condition of his patient. Michael Forester had followed him down stairs unperceived ; and, on hearing these words, not meant for his ear, but manifestly addressed to another, he felt as if lifted up out of the grave.



CHAPTER XXV.

HAD the load of misery under which Michael Forester groaned been all at once removed, it is probable that his mind would have given way, and reason itself been overthrown. He had often meditated upon all other evils that might befall himself or Lucy ; but the death of Agnes had never been suffered to steady itself before his imagination, as an event that might take place ; and, as soon as that horrid catastrophe was imminent, he abandoned himself, with headlong passion, to uttermost despair. But now he was told — and he believed it — that Agnes might recover — nay, was recovering ; and his whole frame of mind and body was shaken as by a convulsion. He walked about the house, and then into the open air, praying and clasping his hands, and sometimes, when he thought himself unobserved, kneeling down and asking forgiveness of Heaven. All that night he continued to sit by her bedside, as he had done for several nights before, although he was assured that the crisis of the

fever was past. Lucy had been removed into another room — but she was in perfect health; and her father, contented with one single kiss of her closed eyes, seemed to forget that she was in the house, and sat like an image by his Agnes. Ruth Colinson, unknown to him, was in the room, for one or other of the family had been by that sick-bed all night long, ever since Agnes had been swimming for her life. Voices were still low, and sad, and whispering, and all the ordinary occupations of the house carried on in silence. Michael longed to hear one cheerful tone — any sound like a laugh — any motion that might denote bustle or activity; for he still gave a rueful interpretation to everything he discerned in his darkness, and shuddered lest the noiselessness of midnight might be a token of despair and death.

Another day and another night passed by, and Michael Forester knew that his Agnes was to be restored. Far was she from death now, according to the judgment of man, as on the afternoon she arrived at Ellesmere. Their usual gentle and steady light had returned to her eyes; the few words she was able, in her weakness, to utter, were composed and happy; she recognised every one with a smile; and two or three quiet tears trickled down her pale cheeks when Michael told her the story of Lucy's departure and journey from Bracken Braes. Michael and Agnes were now left much alone; and, kind and skilful as Mr. Ianson had been, what blessedness to know that his presence was no longer needed in their house. When he did come, it was only a visit of congratulation; and Michael Forester was even able to enjoy his cheerful and jocular conversation; for Mr. Ianson was something of a humorist, and had a store of anecdote, on which the club had drawn every Saturday night for several years, without any visible diminution of the charm of novelty. But, in a few days, the worthy Doctor discontinued even such visits as these; and Agnes, so far from being disturbed, enjoyed the life and animation that, somewhat restrained, were heard once more in every apartment of the Vicarage.

But the joy and gratitude of Lucy exhibited them-

selves in quite a different character. Hope and trust had entered into her young and innocent heart long before her father had dared to indulge them; and, as soon as she was told by Mr. Ianson that her mother was out of danger, a very flood of rapture overflowed her whole spirit. She tried to keep down her joy — she gazed on her mother's sunk cheeks, and wept — she went by herself into the room, or along with Ruth Colinson, and, kneeling down, poured forth the most beautiful extemporaneous thanksgivings — she opened the Bible, and read portions of our Saviour's history, his miracles and crucifixion — she put her arms round Ruth Colinson's neck and kissed her, for Ruth had comforted her day and night — and then going into the fields or orchard with that affectionate girl, she bounded along in her glee, or, for an hour, joined in the work of the haymakers, now housing the produce of the latest enclosure on the hill side. If there were a flower on bank or in hedge-row, Lucy's eyes were sure to detect it; and she formed a small garland, whose sweet smell, she said, would restore her mother; for, "methinks, Ruth, that your English flowers have a finer odor than even those at Bracken Braes; and I must confess that they are richer in their beautiful colors, for here there is mair shelter — ay, it is lowner far than at Holylee."

There had been one Sabbath only since Lucy's arrival at the Vicarage, and that was not a day on which it was possible for the afflicted girl to go to the chapel. But she now took Ruth's arm, who leaned on her brother Miles, and they proceeded to the place of worship. For a while, Lucy heard the bell tinkling; but where, she knew not; for still, at every turning of the path, as they ascended or descended, the sound seemed to come from a different spot. Then the head of the glen, which they had now reached, was quite filled with little wooded eminences, some almost entirely rock, and others partly pasturage — rent, obviously, by some natural convulsion from the sides of the mountains. Between these eminences lay patches of meadow-ground, watered by almost invisible runlets, proceeding from springs, or from the main stream

that wound its increasing way down towards the Vicarage, and, finally, into Windermere. Here Lucy recognised woodmen's huts such as she had known in the Hirst wood, but no other habitation. Well dressed people, however, were issuing from all the coppices; and the bell sounding close at hand, she lifted her eyes in that direction, and there was the beautiful low-roofed chapel of Ellesmere, with its white tower and churchyard, encircled with the murmur of that mountain torrent. As the bell ceased to tinkle, the cry of the kite was heard in the hollow heavens.

Lucy had never been in any public place of worship but the kirk of Holylee. All that she now saw and heard was in form very different, but in spirit the same. This small rural congregation had an organ whose music sounded sweetly and solemnly in that lonesome chapel. The psalm tunes were not the same Lucy had been accustomed to; but her fine ear taught her at once to accompany Ruth, and, with a low and somewhat hesitating voice, she joined in those beautiful hymns. Before the worship was half over, Lucy gave to it the whole religion of her heart. She thought of her mother rescued from death; of her father sitting at that hour by her bedside; of God's mercies to her, a helpless child; and of the kindness experienced from her fellow Christians at the Vicarage; and, with a fervent voice, did the pious creature repeat every response throughout the service.

An annual festival was now at hand, called the Rush Bearing, for which all the maidens in the parish about Lucy and Ruth's age, and indeed much younger, had been making preparations. The origin of this rite, evidently of a religious nature, is not distinctly known; but its celebration is, with good reason, supposed to be a thanksgiving for the hay harvest. It takes place in most districts of Westmoreland, near the end of July, when the hay fields are beginning to get green again with the after grass, and a season almost of comparative inactivity intervenes between it and the first week of September, when the corn-fields are yellow for the sickle. Being a sacred institution, the Rush Bearing, beautiful sight as

it is, partakes of a somewhat solemn character; and although no prayers are said, no hymns are sung, but all is silent, and the very meaning of the rite obscure, yet, at its close, nothing like amusement or recreation occurs, nothing to break the spirit of a ceremonial which piously regards the gratitude of the creature, and the bounty of the Creator.

In the parish of Ellesmeré, the Rush Bearing had, from time immemorial, been observed with more than ordinary attention. The good vicar — which is not usual in other places — always took upon himself the arrangement of the procession. The children all met at the Vicarage, each provided with her flower garland, dressed in white, and adorned with ribbands, whose colors gay, and sometimes even garish, were, notwithstanding, pleasant to behold in that infant band. Nothing whatever was worn on the head, but every ringlet flowed free and unconfined. Ranked according to their height, the innocent creatures walked two by two, with the flower garlands in their hands; and thus the procession moved, silent as a dream, towards the solitary chapel. Lucy and her cousin Martha walked side by side; and it was upon this day that they might be said to have begun to love one another with a sisterly affection. Every heart was happy, it knew not why, for every child that walked in that fair array felt the beauty of that whole of which itself made part; and one spirit of harmonious feeling pervaded the living chain, from the two leading maidens now on the verge of womanhood, to the last two small creatures of five summers, who were often scarcely able to keep up with the slow pace of the procession. The birds kept flying from bough to bough as the Rush Bearing past through the coppice woods; and in every quiet pasture the lambs frisked among their knolls. The chapel door was open, and in went the quiet sisterhood to deposit their flower garlands on the pews, the pulpit, and the altar.

In a few minutes, the interior of the chapel, which, with its dark oak furniture, stained walls, and low raftered roof, was perhaps somewhat gloomy, glowed with a thousand bright and gorgeous colors. Many of the garlands

had been framed with much taste, of garden flowers both rich and rare ; but indeed it is not possible to join together a multitude of blossoms, and buds, and flowers, and leaves, without the aggregate being most beautiful. The Rush Bearers themselves — a name originating in another custom, now disused — could not help eyeing, with delighted wonder, the splendid show of their distributed garlands; and then arranged as before, they reverently left the chapel, and, hand in hand, returned to the Vicarage.

There, beneath the solemn shadow of that ancient yew tree, the vicar's wife had set out tables of simple viands — the same tables at which the merry haymakers had taken their meals. The vicar blessed the bread and fruit ; and when the repast was over, some of the elder maidens sung a hymn. Ruth Colinson whispered to her father, that Lucy would sing one of the psalms used in the kirk at Holylee ; and a leaf would have been heard to fall while she warbled,

“ Plaintive martyrs, worthy of the name.”

The sun was setting in all his glory ; and Agnes, who was now strong enough sometimes to leave her bed, had been for a short time sitting at the window, of which Michael ventured to open a few panes, just as Lucy began to sing by herself —

“ The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green : he leadeth me
The quiet waters by.”



CHAPTER XXVI.

THERE was now entire happiness within the Vicarage of Ellesmere ; for all the shadows of death had disap-

peared, and Agnes, who had lain so long wasted and delirious in hopeless disease, had risen up in her pale returning beauty, and had walked about the shaded pastures, both in the morning and evening light. A deep religious gratitude gave a still more delightful character to those eyes, that never smiled without inspiring affection; and the awe left by the consciousness of the peril from which she had been providentially saved, breathed a mournful composure over a deportment that was at all times naturally sedate, making even the tones of her speech sweeter and more gentle. Her husband had not wholly recovered his usual undisturbed demeanor; yet everything he said or did expressed, to Mr. Colinson, repentance for that passion of grief that had so utterly overwhelmed him, and shewed that, on another trial, his heart would probably be more humble and obedient. But where was Lucy in her joy? Tell how the linnet in spring passes every hour in its vale of sunshine. In the gray dawn, before the yellow sunlight tinged the diadem of the elm grove, or melted the veil of diamonds that lay over the dewy sward, before the thrush had fed her brood, or the young swallows looked out from their nests below the antique cornice, while yet the kine were reposing, and the hare sitting fearless at a distance from his shelter, Lucy was out in the morning solitude, and forgetting her happiest dreams in the still and shaded loveliness that was gradually brightening over heaven and earth. Sometimes, even before Ruth Colinson was awake, had Lucy been by herself all the way to the chapel, and received kind words from the shepherds going to the mountains. The long day glided by, she knew not how, in various delights; and often did she wonder, on looking at the sky, to see that the sun was indeed setting among his golden clouds. And was Bracken Braes forgotten? The green broomy hills and treeless banks of Heriot Water — that one wooded linn, the howlet's nest, and he whom her heart had so often beat within her inmost bosom to meet there — Edward Ellis! No, no — all Lucy's affections were true to the place of her birth; and sad although she certainly

would be when the day came — now near at hand — that they must take their departure from Ellesmere, yet her heart yearned, at the forethought, towards sweet Scotland, and there, among the banks and braes where she was born, might she also live, die, and be buried.

But this is the morning of the most beautiful festival that cheers the land of lakes, Windermere Regatta; and Miles Colinson, with Lucy and Ruth, will join in his pinnacle that Mediterranean fleet. As for Martha, she shewed her good sense and her good feeling in preferring to accompany the people from whom she was about so soon to part; and Alexander Ainslie, who had become a prodigious favorite at the Vicarage, attended the nymphs of the household in his Scotch bonnet, which he wore with an air of pride, as if the object of universal observation. So bound to the Vicarage, by love and by fear, had been the heart of the affectionate Lucy ever since her arrival from Scotland, that she had never once left the vale of Ellesmere — the chapel, and the rocks around it, having been the boundary of her rambles. One glance of Windermere was all that she had taken on that troubled day, when she was flying to her mother; and its beauty was like a dim dream to her imagination. But now the party winded joyously up the wooded hills, and below the precipices that intervened between secluded Ellesmere and the queen of the lakes; and Lucy promised not to turn her eyes from the scenery immediately around her, till Miles Colinson had conducted her to a natural watch-tower at High Wray, built of rocks that no lever could have stirred, and with a flight of steps that had been hung in air by an earthquake. Miles Colinson then took his gentle hand from Lucy's forehead, while he and Ruth watched the expression of her countenance as Windermere burst upon her view — water, woods, air, and sky, all blended together in beautiful and magnificent repose.

The simple creature had never known any other world than that of Holylee. That pastoral parish was to her the image of the whole earth. After reading to her father about other countries, all thought of them was laid aside with the book, and she saw and heard only the scenery

of her native vale. But now Lucy felt herself in heaven — no dream, but a reality enduring in its delight. The bliss of novelty, beyond all doubt or comparison, of every bliss that the human soul can know, the most vivid, luminous, and dazzling, now possessed her whole being as she gazed and gazed; a capacity of happiness adequate to the beauty for the first time revealed, suddenly unfolded itself within her nature, and in the midst of her wildered and exulting happiness, she wept to know that her mother had been saved from death, and that the Great Being who stretched out the heavens and the earth, had looked with an eye of mercy on her sick bed, had hearkened to the prayers of her, a poor little child, and on his throne had guarded the footsteps of her blind father. "O Ruth, Ruth! this is by far the happiest day of all my life; and I will think of it, dream of it, every day and every night, as long as I live, when I am far, far away in Scotland." But Ruth took her hand, without any reply, and bounding together down the mossy steps, scattered the wild rose leaves, but without startling the redbreast from its nest; and then along the sloping hay fields and old flowery leas, the two happy creatures stood breathless on a little pier that jutted into a bay, and there saluted Miles, whom they had absolutely outrun, with a laugh of raillery, as he handed them tripping into the boat, and then, with vigorous arm, made the Antelope of Ellesmere glide, with her broken shadow, under rock, and along level shore, till she reached the middle of the lake, and pointed her prow towards the place of rendezvous, Lowood Bay, with its few sentinel pine trees, and wooded mountain, with all its peaceful battlements.

Lucy remembered her voyage up Ullswater; but the wind had wafted the Naiad so swiftly along, that she scarcely knew where she was, till again standing on the shore. Grief and fear too had blinded and deafened her to the beauty of that morning. But now life and joy were one. The heaven smiled over her head; and as she looked down, there also were the heavens, whenever the oars rested, and the pinnace, with its gaudy flag yet unfolded, floated with almost imperceptible motion on the

air-like water. But for the little bells that went wavering in myriads past the gunwale, and shewed that they were on another element, Lucy could have thought herself sailing through the very skies, and a sort of pleasing fear subdued her gladness, when once more the Antelope resumed her flight, and brought them within hearing of the merry music, becoming every moment more clear and distinct from Lowood Bay. "Ay, there 's the Bowness band!" exclaimed Ruth; how sweet, Lucy, is the sound of the clarionet and bugle, and does not the hollow sound of the great drum fill the whole lake from Ecclerig-Crag to Water Head!"

Just behind a low pastoral point, that, running out from a coppice wood, formed one of the horns of a small bay, that to the careless eye was not observed to be a bay at all, but thought to be merely part of the straight shore, was anchored in shallow water, and within leap of the silver sanded beach, the Antelope of Ellesmere. From that station there was not only a view of Lowood Bay, distant a few hundred yards, but of the lake down to Belle Isle, and across to the undisturbed waters of Poolwyke, that seemed a lake of themselves, and almost separated in their still seclusion, from the spirit of festivity now breaking out all along the opposite shore. Like apparitions rising up from the depths of the lake — from whence they came Lucy knew not nor could conjecture — many a gaily painted pinnace now moved twinkling over the broad bosom of Windermere, and the echoes answered to shouts and laughter from the merry crews striving in amicable contest. Lucy started to her feet at the first signal gun, which she thought close to their anchorage; and the little carronade having been placed on a spot commanding a multitudinous echo, it seemed as if, on that cloudless sky, peals of thunder were rolling round the whole circle of mountains, and more than once reawakening, when all thought them over, died faint and afar off, beyond the blue skies of Langdale Pikes — a mountain that, look where you will, still forms part of the scenery of Windermere.

Not one lazy straggler was now seen out upon the

lake; but the whole tiny fleet was moored around the bay — a bright and gorgeous circle of flags and awnings. The rowing boats now started for the prize, and all was animation and enthusiasm. But Lucy was told to look away from the race, towards Calgarth and Millar-ground — for the sea had sent its southern breezes, and the sail-boats, that had lain all morning becalmed in the bay of Bowness, now loomed on the horizon, and stooping beneath the winds that they were bringing along with them to the stillness of the airless water of Lowood, soon shewed the various splendor of their array, and proudly imparted another character to the whole festival. “There goes the flying schooner, the Victory,” said Miles Colinson, an enthusiastic and skilful fresh-water sailor, “and that is the Endeavor, with its long white pendant, close upon her stern, standing on the same tack. They are going nearly before the wind now, and, methinks, the Endeavor is about to run foul of the boom of her mainsail; but we shall see before evening which eats the other out of the wind, when close hauled, and in the winds’s eye, weathering Seymour Crag. Look, Lucy, are they not beautiful?” Beautiful, indeed, they appeared to her eyes; but their beauty was as that of living creatures, and their motion as that of life, while, with wings white as snow, and meteors attending their course, they held their undeviating progress towards the mountains, and apparently without any guidance but that of their own spirit, went gliding by the hanging groves and woods. “‘Auld Langsyne,’ as I live!” exclaimed Lucy. And, as the cloud of sail carried away that melancholy music, the Scottish maiden was, for a moment, at Bracken Braes, sitting beneath the plane tree, and the Heriot Water murmuring along the willow haugh, down to the linn and the Manse of Holylee.

Apart from the bay and all its beautiful confusion, yet near enough to enter into the spirit of the festival, the crew of the Antelope remained with her during all the boat races, at their quiet anchorage. But Miles Colinson now weighed anchor, and Lucy took her seat at the stern, while Ruth relieved the flag from its staff, proud

of the emblazoning which their joint needlework had formed during the long evenings below the yew tree. "We must take our place in the grand aquatic procession," said Miles, with a smile; "but I must take care not to run down the Nil Timeo, the ten-oared barge of the Windermere Sailing Club." Much brandishing and splashing of oars there was, before both lines were formed, and the "grand aquatic procession" moved in the sunshine over the dark blue waters, as if some doughty Doge were about to wed the Lady of the Lake. The crew of each boat, doubtless, thought her the brightest star in that moving constellation; and so occupied were all the rowers and their companies with their nice and difficult duties, that it was only now and then that the sail-boats attracted notice, when bearing down, with a freshened breeze, upon the procession returning to its anchorage in the form of a crescent. They tacked suddenly, just when about to break the line, and bore away majestically before the wind, with their bands playing "Rule Britannia," or "God save the King."

"Ruth, Ruth," exclaimed Lucy, "there is bonny Agatha Marshall, who was so kind to me at her father's house on the banks of that other lake;" and the two boats were now so close together that Lucy and Agatha shook hands across their gunwales, and then again in a moment, were separated by an oar length of foamy water. By this time, Lucy had become quite a bold sailor: and, taking off her bonnet, that she might behold the spectacle on all sides, down fell her clustering ringlets in a shower of sunbeams over her cheeks and neck; and never had the Cambridge scholar beheld in imagination so bright a figure of an Hour, a Grace, or a Nereid, as that fair Scottish shepherdess, now gazing on him with smiles of bewildered happiness. Like an hour, too, she was to pass away; and, although unforgotten, yet to return never, never more. But the horns of the crescent had touched Lowood Bay — a hundred oars rose into the air — the boats were again anchored or drawn up to the beach — the whole fleet deserted by their crews — and the shores

alive, from the water edge to the knolls below the wooded Scaur where the hawks inhabit.

Lucy sought anxiously, through the moving crowd, for Agatha Marshall; and it was not long before they recognised each other. The Colinsons and Marshalls were not altogether strangers, and the two parties agreed to retire from the stir and bustle of the scene, and have a repast in some quiet glade within reach of the lake breezes. Miles soon recollected a fit spot, half way between Lowood and Ecclerig; and a crowd of remembrances came over Lucy's mind, when, in a few minutes, they sat down upon the bank of a charcoal pit, within a wood that had been thinned that very spring — so perfectly like the Hirst wood, where her father lost his sight in that thunder storm. Agatha, Lucy, and Ruth, were all intimate friends in a few minutes; and Lucy's eyes beamed with joy to hear that the lieutenant had been most prosperous in his late cruise, and was now quite a rich man. "They say we are to have peace soon, and then my brother will live with us at Seathwaite Hall, and we shall get regattas of our own on Ullswater; Lucy Forester will surely visit her friends again — and I do not despair of seeing her with us long before — I am married."

Mirth and merriment soon grew general, but never loud, over that sylvan saloon. In an hour or two, the heron, that had been disturbed by unusual clamor, was seen returning from Rydal woods, with wings moving not quicker than oars, and his flight gradually descending nearer and nearer the water, as he kept approaching his nest on Rough-holm, by the deserted bay of Ray-rigg. The wind, too, was dying away, as the sun declined westward; and here and there a boat, with elderly people and children taking an early farewell of the revelries, crawled almost reluctantly homewards along the sleeping lake, that was spread with deepening shadows. Independently of the umbrage of the forest boughs, the air was cooler, although calmer; and the butterflies, that had enjoyed that day of light, had all settled down upon the wild flowers. "Part we must not without some Scottish music," was the feeling of all the party; and Lucy, who

never in all her life had been asked twice to do anything she could do, warbled the wildest and most mournful spirit of the genius of her country. There were wet eyes during some of those airs; for worthy, indeed, were they of tears, sung as they now were by one to whom nature had taught the music of the heart, in whose sorrow innocence rejoices amidst the pauses of its gladness, and then returns more happy to its own living world. It seemed, as she sung, that the composure of the soul within her almost sobered the golden gleam above her forehead, and touched with paleness the roses of her cheek. Fair moved the bosom of one not yet woman grown, while those liquid murmurs left her lips apart in their beauty; and when, at the close of the tune, every tongue and eye applauded, Lucy soon recovered all her gladsome smiles, and lifted up from the sward eyes that looked as if they could express no other emotion than that of rejoicing happiness.



CHAPTER XXVII.

THE stay of the Foresters at the Vicarage of Ellesmere had been protracted some time beyond the almost perfect recovery of Agnes, by mutual friendship of a very deep and endearing character. Distress and sympathy had opened up and exhibited the recesses of each other's hearts, and that two months' visit had made revelation of feelings which might have lain concealed during a whole life. But the day of parting had come at last. The vicar, his wife, and his son and daughters, had accompanied their beloved guests as far as Seathwaite Hall, on Ullswater, and the final farewell had thus been less melancholy than if it had taken place at the door of their own dwelling. Michael parted from a friend in Mr. Colinson whom he held dearer than he supposed he could have done any new acquaintance at his time of life, when the

heart is contented with affections of old standing, and is slow to expand itself fully under the power of any fresh attachment. The admirable character of the vicar — one of the most modest, humble, and unassuming of men — had betrayed itself unconsciously, in many simple traits, almost every day after their friendship was a week old; and Michael, — who, at first, scarcely understood how to reconcile Mr. Colinson's zeal in secular concerns with such a religious spirit as his sacred profession demanded, and wondered a little at his manual labors in the hay field and the barn — ere long discerned that the reconciliation of custom can, without moral injury, blend together pursuits elsewhere deemed repugnant, and acknowledged that the life of a good man ought not to be tried by any other test than the consistency of its own condition. In Scotland, Michael Forester was aware that no clergyman could engage personally in rural toils, almost like a hind, without loss of character and implied degradation of mind; but, in Ellesmere, the spirit of the clerical life had for ages been of this homely and primitive kind. Even in dress, the vicar, he was told by Agnes, was but little distinguished from the respectable householders around; and, clad as he was, throughout the week, in gray, she confessed that she had never completely felt that he was a clergyman till the first Sabbath, when, walking to the chapel, he appeared just like Mr. Kennedy at Holylee — more dignified and impressive it might be, from the contrast of his usual homeliness of dress and manner; but, in good truth, each member of the family at the Vicarage was alike estimable. Although far inferior, both in mental and corporeal gifts, to Agnes, yet Mrs. Colinson was a woman without guile, and of a truly Christian spirit. She had borne many afflictions, that had never fallen to the lot of Agnes, with unrepining resignation. No human being ever worshipped her Maker more, in spirit and in truth, than did she, every Sabbath, in that little chapel. Her charities were like the night dews — felt, not seen; and one good deed was by her forgotten in another; her whole life being passed in a quiet succession of kindnesses towards her fellow creatures. Ruth, her sole sur

viving daughter, was also the flower of all the flock, and allowed to be the sweetest and the prettiest girl in Ellesmere; and Miles, who had already distinguished himself at Cambridge, both in classical literature and science, reminded the elder statesmen in the neighboring vales of his uncle, Joshua Colinson, formerly curate of Wansfield, whose fame as a mathematician and divine still survived in those obscure and remote places, whither he had retired in the prime of life, and where he had died, in ignoble but useful retirement, in a green old age. But the Foresters were far away from the Vicarage now; and had returned, all safe and well, to Bracken Braes.

If tears had blinded Lucy's eyes as they stole a last glance of Ellesmere, it is not to be thought that they were dry when, once more, she beheld the spire of Holy-lee kirk. As they passed the Manse, her heart beat wildly; for there was Edward Ellis, with a kindly smile, and a look of rejoicing salutation. Aunt Isobel was on the look-out for them below the plane tree; and, after the first weeping embrace was over, and all had time to feel that the roof of Bracken Braes was indeed over them once more, Michael gave thanks to the Almighty for bringing them all out of their late tribulation. Little or no change was visible in the rooms; as far as their faithful memory served, everything was in its usual place — untouched, yet free from dust. The old clock, that had rest while Aunt Isobel sojourned in the Manse, now ticked with all its power; a few books lay on the broad wooden chimney-piece, and Lucy remembered the very passage she had been reading that day the letter came from Mr. Colinson about her mother's illness; the barking glee of the two shepherd dogs was over, and the creatures sat each at its own side of the fire, glad of the return; and there was the speckle-breasted mavis, in his cheerful prison, aware that it was Lucy's white hand that now ran its fingers along the wicker-bars. The seasons at Bracken Braes were not so early as at Ellesmere. It was not above a week ago since the first swathe of grass had fallen before the scythe. "To-morrow," said William Laidlaw, "the rakers will be all in the haugh, and I am mis-

taen if ye hae seen or heard o' a heavier crop in ony part o' England." — "Stupid creatures!" quoth Isobel, "not one o' you can speak a word o' English; ye hae a' the Scottish accent sae strong that it is just perfectly vulgar. Couldna the vicar, as you call him, or his son the student, have taught you a mair refined discourse? You'll be a' Episcopals, I doubt not? And what'll you think o' the kirk o' Holylee, in comparison wi' that chapel o' Ellesmere that Lucy wrote me so long a letter about, wi' its organ, and hymns, and printed prayers?" But Aunt Isobel now spoke to those who understood all her peculiar modes of speech, and knew how rightly to interpret its meanings. Every Sabbath had she, sitting in the kirk of Holylee, thought of them in the chapel of Ellesmere; and, whatever differences there might be in their forms of worship, and solemnly attached as she was to her own simple form of faith, deeply did she feel that, wherever a few were gathered together in sincerity, God would be in the midst of them, and mercifully, as he thought fitting, grant their prayers.

Aunt Isobel scrutinized Martha, the orphan, with kind but keen eyes, and asked and answered a hundred questions. She was much pleased with Martha's plain, quiet, and sensible manners, and declared that she would have known her to be her father's child had she met her at Japan. "Ay, ay, my good Martha, you have been a hard-working lassie, they tell me; and hae worked, too, a' your days, for them that were not o' your ain blood; but you'll lead a different life, my bairn, at Bracken Braes, and we'll a' use you as kindly as we do Lucy herself. O Agnes! don't you see the very glint o' poor Abel's eye there; and there, too, the self same dimples that showed themselves in ilka cheek whenever he laughed, which was often and often, in the shortest day; for a merrier man than Abel Forester never sang at his work beneath heaven's sunshine."

In a very few days, Martha was quite at home at Bracken Braes. She felt, with gratitude, that the kind promises that had been made to her before she left Westmoreland had been more than realized. At meals, at all

their fireside work or leisure, at prayers, in bed, (for she slept with Lucy,) the once neglected or oppressed orphan now felt herself taken within the affection of many excellent hearts, and gradually becoming familiar with thoughts and feelings of whose existence she had formerly known nothing, but that found out corresponding chords in her own nature. Pleased with herself, thankful to her Maker, every day more and more attached to all the family, and naturally fond of work and averse to all idleness, Martha was soon thought quite a treasure, and her character began to stand high in the parish. The hay harvest went on apace; and Martha, although at first a little puzzled with the Scotch fashion, soon distinguished herself by her perseverance and activity. Jacob Mayne declared she was worth her weight in gold, and held her up as a pattern to his own daughters, who, it must be confessed, were somewhat indolent, and afraid of the sun tanning their skin, and hurting the delicacy of their complexion. Good humor, contentment, and a willingness to do one's best, are prime qualities in the character of a cottage girl; and, although Martha was no beauty, yet they gave a pleasing expression to ordinary enough features; and, except Lucy herself, no one, at the close of the week, was more admired in the haugh.

Few states of life are more delightful than the calm and tranquil return into old dear familiar habits, even although they may have been interrupted by a change in itself perfectly happy. Michael's feet knew well all the ground about Bracken Braes, and, after the necessary confinement of a new kind of scenery at Ellesmere, he now felt an enlargement of mind in the greater freedom of motion in all his limbs; again the day was subdivided in a way that had long been habitual to him; and all the ongoinings of his farm told him perpetually where the sun stood in heaven. Once more, too, he had taken his place as an elder below the pulpit; Mr. Kennedy's voice was even pleasanter to his ear than before — no disparagement to the reading of the good vicar; and thoroughly as he had entered into the spirit of the service of the Church of England, yet to him the sanctifying power of

years lay upon his own form of worship. Agnes had never hoped to see Bracken Braes more, and to her it was dearer — more beautiful than ever; while Lucy, convincing herself, with many a sigh, that she must never hope to be at Ellesmere again, except in a dream, cherished the remembrance of all its loveliness, without losing any of her attachment to the sweet place of her nativity. Bare, naked, and bleak it was, no doubt, in comparison with that English valley; but, in spring and in summer, what place, in its own way, could be more beautiful than the vale of Heriot Water, all the way down from Lady-side to Holylee?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THERE were two causes of distress to Lucy, soon after her return from Westmoreland; her two dearest friends — the highest and the lowest — Emma Cranstoun of the Hirst, and Mary Morrison of Ewebank, were both ill in health and depressed in spirit. Mary had only once been over at Bracken Braes for a single hour, and Lucy had but once visited her in return. Both times the poor creature's eyes had seemed red with weeping; and when a smile crossed her face, it was more woeful than any other expression. She fixed her eyes on Lucy's, as if she had some secret to reveal and confide to her affection; but then would turn away in ghastly silence, and even cover her face with her hands, or for a while disappear. Lucy knew that she had a harsh father, but there seemed now about Mary Morrison a deeper distress than could arise from that cause, which had always existed the same, and Mary herself said — "I canna speak — I daurna speak — but my heart is broken, Lucy, and before winter I may be in my grave, and my soul called to judgment." Lucy breathed not a word to her parents

or Aunt Isobel of Mary's melancholy state of mind ; but determined to persuade her friend, whom she loved more tenderly than ever, to tell her what secret misery was preying upon her life.

On her visit to the Hirst, at the earnest request of the Lady herself, Lucy was, if possible, even more distressed by her appearance than by that of Mary Morrison. Emma Cranstoun, who, only a few weeks ago, leaped so lightsofly from her palfrey at the cottage doors, was lying on a couch so faint and languid, that she did not rise up on Lucy's entrance into the room, but stretched out her hand, which felt hot and feverish, as Lucy kissed it with tears of affliction. "My old malady has come back, my friend ; and I fear it must be called a consumption. Yet I am not in that cheerful frame of mind which it is said consumptive persons go with to the very grave. No, my sweet Lucy, my heart is disquieted within me, and I fear to die. Much have I longed for your return ; yet now that I see you, I am too weak both in mind and body to enjoy your presence as I always used to do. But sit still — do not go away."

Lucy Forester loved Mary Morrison, as two innocent and humble creatures love each other, in equal condition of lowliness. But with her love for the Lady of the Hirst was blended that admiration — that reverence with which a guileless child of poor estate will naturally regard a high-born and beautiful benefactress. From her father's cottage had she come with all humility into the drawing-room of that old hall. Surrounded with all the elegancies — even splendors of rank — little as she was known to value them — now lay with a deep hectic flush upon her cheeks, and with eyes of a brilliancy that pained Lucy's heart she knew not why, the lady whom all the country loved. For Mary Morrison Lucy would have watched night after night — for her would she fearlessly have walked over mountains and moors, in the frost and snow of winter midnights ; but for the Lady of the Hirst, she felt that she was ready to die on a moment's warning — willing to leave father, and mother, and all, so that she might purchase life for Emma Cranstoun.

That one so good, so pure, so beautiful beyond compare, so charitable, and so religious, and so far superior in all her looks, words, and motions, to everybody else she had ever seen — that such a being should die, was a thought too dreadful to be endured — even although Lucy well knew that, were it to be so, it would be an instant change from earth to heaven.

“Lucy, I have more comfort in your presence even than in Mr. Kennedy’s, excellent Christian as he is, and kind to me, as if I were his own daughter. Oh! sweet — heavenly sweet were the sounds of that psalm, the first evening I ever was at Bracken Braes! I must get you to sing it to me on my death-bed.” Lucy laid her head on the couch and wept; but suddenly a cheering comfort came, she knew not whence, into her heart. “I will sing you every psalm, every hymn I know — but not on your death-bed, lady — for you will recover, and ride about the braes as you used to do, blessing the houses of the poor!” — “Read these letters, Lucy, and tell me what you think; remember the eye of God is at all times on his creatures, and speak the truth.”

Little did Lucy Forester know of this world — little of its awful or its mean mysteries — but these miserable letters altogether shocked and baffled her reason. In them the weak or wicked writer told Emma Cranstoun that she was assuredly dying — that her mother and sisters had all died of consumption, which was hereditary in the family — that Mr. Kennedy knew nothing of the spirit of the Gospel promises, and that she ought to call in to the aid of her soul some very different minister of Christ, before it was too late, for that after death cometh judgment! Lucy felt an indiscrible horror of such a cruel and merciless communication; and, weak and ignorant child as she was, there was a power in her unperverted conscience that appealed, in a few simple words, to the quaking heart of her benefactress. “Oh! best of all ladies that ever brought the blessing of their presence across the threshold of the poor, what sins and iniquities can you have to repent of — what evil thought did your bosom ever conceive — what evil word did your lips ever

utter — what evil deed did your hands ever perform? Can my father, and my mother, and Mr. Kennedy, and all the rest of the people in the parish, be in the wrong, who all bless your name, and count them happy days since you came to live at the Hirst? No doubt we are all frail, all fallen, all corrupt. The Bible tells us that — but the Bible tells us that there is a Savior; and if you will let me, I will read you some chapters that will set your heart at rest."

Who may be a wiser interpreter of many of the doctrines of Christianity than an innocent and guileless maiden, who has been brought up at the knee of a father whom religion had reconciled to a sore distress? May such a one not explain the spirit of those passages, whose celestial beauty has brought heaven upon her midnight dreams? Meanings perhaps too fine and pure for the comprehension of strongest minds, polluted or deadened by worldly pursuits, may become familiarly known to such a reader in her simplicity, and flow in eloquence from her lips, when her heart is touched at once with devotion to her Maker, and love for a fallen creature united to her in congenial innocence. The eye of such a meek and humble one falls, as if by a sacred instinct, on the promises of redeeming mercy. If fear and awe mingle with her love, it is but to chasten it into a solemn holiness. The affection she bears to her father on earth is transferred to her Father in heaven, but more tender, still more overpowering, more full of trust — now indeed piety! Then the Word of God explains itself — there is light upon every page; and the young Christian, indeed, enjoys a revelation!

Emma Cranstoun, in the despondency of disease, and the solitariness of that old mansion, had kept those pernicious letters below her pillow, and read them so often, that a belief began to settle in her heart that their contents were full of fearful truths, and that they might, perhaps, have been written by a truly religious spirit, in pity of her lost state. But the sound of Lucy's voice — so earnest in her affection and simplicity — dispelled the horrid dream; she allowed herself to be persuaded that

Mr. Kennedy knew what Christianity was far better than the writer of such letters; and having got the better of worse fears, she began to hope that perhaps the fear of death might be premature, and that God would yet spare her life for a few years.

For how could life be otherwise than dear to Emma Cranstoun — young, good, beautiful, and rich, both in natural endowments and the gifts of fortune? She had an eye to see the loveliness of earth and heaven — feeling, fancy, and imagination to enjoy and to create enjoyment. Whatever happiness a human being might derive from this world, and its allowed affections, she might well hope to share; and to shut her eyes for ever upon it all, was a rueful thought, and hard to be borne. But she wished still more earnestly to live, that she might do good, and practice the precepts of her faith. All these desires blended together in her prayers; and although sometimes she upbraided herself with too worldly a love of life, at other seasons she felt assured that her yearning after the good of her fellow creatures was sincere — and sincere too, in as far as the frailty of her nature could allow her conviction that there was no virtue but in obedience to the will of God. Sickness, such as her's, sometimes elevates and sometimes depresses the spirit; but it needs the comfort of human love; and that, in her case, was found in Lucy Forester. "I never sleep, Lucy, at least seldom two hours together, and the nights are weary long! but if I had you in the room, methinks I should have pleasant slumbers." — "Me in the room, my beloved lady! My mother is well now; and I have a cousin, you know, at Bracken Braes, to take my place in the house. I beseech you, let me lie beside you, or on the floor close to your bed; a whisper will awake me; and, in a short time — in a week or a month at the longest — you will be as well as ever; for, O lady, what mortal creature can do without sleep, and not faint both in body and in soul?"

Some slight opposition was made to the arrangement by an old lady, a relation of Emma's, who had been a sort of guardian to her since her father's death — not the

most judiciously chosen in the world ; but it was at once overruled ; and a bed being made for Lucy, by that of her gracious mistress, it was fixed, by a message to Bracken Braes, that she should remain a month at the Hirst, the friend of Emma Cranstoun — so said the lady herself ; but Lucy called herself by another name — not even companion, but servant ; and in that name she rejoiced with an humble pride.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE duties which Lucy now daily and hourly discharged, were to her so truly delightful, and so entirely occupied her whole capacity of affection, that it may almost be said her heart was away from Bracken Braes, and bound to the Hirst by a spirit of homefelt happiness. Her love to her parents was so vital, that, like the beatings of that heart, it went on unconsciously ; nor was the innocent creature afraid or ashamed even occasionally to forget them, knowing well that they were dearer to her than all the rest of the world. From infancy she had loved, honored, and obeyed them ; and, since their return from Westmoreland, she felt that their affection for her had, if possible, increased. More than once they had alluded to her flight to Ellesmere, and in such a way as told Lucy how proud they were of their dutiful daughter. Aunt Isobel had long ceased to scold her on account of that wild adventure, and had even told her, when they two were alone, that she had blessed her on her knees the very hour her flight was known, from the little paper in the Bible. “ Yes, my bonny bairn, I thocht o’ the fifth commandment — ‘ Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.’ ” With Emma Cranstoun, therefore, she could reside without being

guilty of any neglect of home; and there was nothing to restrain the flow of all her tenderest and warmest feelings towards her benefactress.

In that feeble and languid frame, both of body and mind, into which the Lady of the Hirst had gradually sunk, the perpetual presence of a creature so blithe and joyful, yet, at the same time, so quiet and humble as Lucy, worked like a very charm, and brought back to her beautiful countenance some of those smiles that had been familiar there for several years of renovated health. The spirit of the invalid, when relapsing into melancholy or frightful trains of thought, was arrested by the motions, the words, or the eyes of her devoted attendant, and brought back to the contemplation of this cheerful world. Lucy narrated to her all that she knew of the histories of the families in the parish; and her knowledge was confined to their good qualities, their enjoyments, or their misfortunes. Her little pictures of life were drawn from what she had seen by humble hearths; but they were drawn with animation and delight, since the lady was desirous to know from her what thoughts and feelings were familiar at the firesides of the poor. The interest which she took in all such representations, made Lucy believe more and more that her own lowly condition was the very happiest that Providence could have bestowed on her; while, on the other hand, Emma Cranstoun drew, from all the tales and stories of the simple girl, a stronger and stronger trust in the power of resignation and faith to support the soul in all extremities. "Let me believe as all these poor cottagers believe, and my Maker may forgive all my sins, and reconcile me, if it be his will, to an early death."

Lucy had never been at any reading school, but had been taught to read by her father, and mother, and Aunt Isobel. Ever since the time of her father's blindness, she had read to him two or three hours daily on an average, and, during the dead of winter, much more than that; and as her understanding and feelings expanded, nature had taught Lucy her own elocution. She always remembered for whose sake she was performing that

pleasant task, and filial love and reverence had inspired intonations most touching and expressive. The books, too, that Lucy had read, were such as gave her, day after day, insights into that nature to which she belonged; and she had learned to think on it with awe, although yet, in her innocence, almost ignorant of its evil. Little, therefore, as Lucy Forester had seen or suffered, in that little quiet world, where joy was steady as the daylight, and grief like the mere flitting clouds, she had thoughts and feelings within her heart that rose up to meet whatever was congenial to them, whether offered in conversation of the old, or in the religious books that formed the chief part of her father's library. Emma Cranstoun could not but listen with delighted surprise to many of the young creature's sentiments; and never did she weary of hearing her silver voice reading portions of her favorite authors, with an accent unrefined, no doubt, and with a pronunciation that might have offended very fastidious ears, but with a pathos or an intelligence alternating beautifully with the various meanings of every passage. While Lucy thus cheered the soul of her benefactress, and, by sweet, solemn, or sacred compositions, brought the dim hush of evening imperceptibly on the daylight that was often nearly gone before the sun had been observed by them to be sinking westwards, she at the same time was enlightening her own mind by these labors of love, and gradually coming to know more and more of herself, her fellow creatures, and her Creator.

Where now were all Emma Cranstoun's elegant and graceful accomplishments, the fruit of a consummate education successfully pursued? Vain, indeed, did she now hold them all — more vain, perhaps, than they really were; for they were intended to adorn the rejoicing days of health, not to support the despondency of sickness. Her lute, her guitar, and her harp, were now all silent; and the pencil refused to obey her feeble fingers. Yet Lucy, who had in other days often listened in rapture to the witchery of those stringed instruments, echoing through the saloons of that old hall, or in some secret covert in the huge armed woods, and had gazed on the

lady who touched them as on a creature almost too beautiful for this world, could not join in the dispraise or censure of endowments that, when the soul was not sick, could dispense such pure delight. "In a few weeks, my beloved lady, your hands will again be equal to your music and your drawing; and harm surely there can be none in such gifts as these! Never hearkened I to your singing to the touch of the harp, without thinking of hallelujahs in heaven; and sure enough that is the figure of an angel you gave me last summer, drawn by your own hand, with a face hidden in adoration of the Great God, by the foldings of the immortal creature's wings."

Emma Cranstoun possessed much genius, and it was apparent in every trifling work of her hands. She touched nothing, whether it was an article of dress or furniture, or the disposition of a flower stand, or the arrangement of a rose bed, or border of carnations or lilies, without producing an effect unattainable by common hands. Lucy was not long in catching something of this spirit of beautiful invention. Above all things, she had ever loved, studied, and understood, flowering plants and shrubs, such as, in our cold northern climate, flourished only under shelter. This lore her father had taught her; for Michael Forester, a botanist and a florist, had come at last to know every plant by the touch of its leaves or its flowers; and many rare specimens had been collected at Bracken Braes, some of the finest of which were now sent over to the Hirst, for the lady's own domestic greenhouse, between her parlor and her bedroom. Such were the occupations in which Lucy's hours glided away; and when occasionally visitors came to the Hirst, and the lady was well enough to receive them, Lucy, who knew her own place and office, soon retired modestly from the room, but seldom or never without causing many a question to be asked concerning one so beautiful in her humility.

The Lady of the Hirst had now recovered so much strength, that, of her own accord, she allowed Lucy to return home. "I shall be dull without you, Lucy, and

my parlor will soon miss your hands. What will become of our green-house when you are gone? But you must try to visit me once a-week, if possible; for to you it is but a trip across the braes. I would fain walk with you to the beeches, but I must not leave the temperature of my sick-room. Perhaps I may be feeblér — worse — nearer death — when you come to see me again; but, sweet Lucy, the same love will be in my heart." And, as she kissed Lucy's cheek, although her own was dry, the kiss touched a gush of tears that were not to be withheld or hidden. "Oh! that you would let me be your servant all the winter; for, if you would, it is certain, with the blessing of God, that you would be quite well in the spring!" This proposal was a pleasant one indeed to Emma Cranstoun; and it was arranged, that, if Lucy could leave Bracken Braes during the winter, without any distress to her parents, she was to be an inmate at the Hirst.

As the old towers of the Hirst disappeared in the woods, and then the woods themselves in the airy distance, Lucy ceased to reflect, for the present, on the life she had been leading there, and began to think of Mary Morrison and Ewebank. From those pictured walls and hanging curtains, couches, and vases, and all the splendid elegancies which to her eyes still wore a charm shed over them by her own young imagination, she turned, without the slightest abatement of love and delight, into that low and somewhat gloomy hut. There Mary was sitting at her wheel, and her father in his chair by the hearth. Lucy's heart always sunk in his presence, for his aspect wore a settled sternness, and his voice wanted that cordial tone, without which even the kindest words are felt to want their most essential charm. Mary's face was even paler and more mournful than ever; and as soon as her eye met Lucy's, it was overspread with a disordered flush far from betokening happiness. "So you have been staying for a month bygone at the Hirst, Miss Lucy," said Abraham, rather ungraciously, and without rising from his chair. "I wish you may not forget your auld friends among sic fine folk. For my ain part, I think Mary there

better at home." Lucy felt that she did not deserve such a reproof, and replied, somewhat eagerly, that she would always be happy to visit at any friend's house where she got a warm welcome. Perhaps she might have said something stronger; but on looking towards Mary, who was stooping down her head, as if busy with disentangling her threads, she observed the tears fast falling; and in a moment changed her voice and her face into her usual sweetness. "No, no, Mr. Morrison; I love your daughter Mary better, if indeed that be possible, even than the Lady of the Hirst. We two are equal in condition, although I am somewhat younger in years; and if you, sir, would be glad to see me here, I will come over to Ewebank every week." The perfect simplicity and sincerity of these words touched Abraham's self-tormenting and discontented spirit; and he told Lucy to sit down, for that she was, he verily believed, the best girl in the parishes either of Ferns or of Holylee. Already, by this time, were Mary's tears wiped away, and there was something almost like cheerfulness in the house.

Mary Morrison said that she would accompany Lucy part of the way to Bracken Braes, and they walked on in silence. But just as Mary turned about to communicate some sorrow, Edward Ellis was seen bounding down the hill; so she hastily wrung Lucy's hand, and, with a face of deep melancholy, returned to Ewebank.

It was not possible for Lucy's heart not to throw off much of its sadness, whether for her own sake or that of others, on this sudden appearance of Edward Ellis. Circumstances had prevented her from seeing much of him since her return from Ellesmere, and she had never been alone in his company since that midnight journey among the mountains. The many affecting thoughts that had almost ever since possessed her heart, had by no means excluded his image; but they had certainly hindered it from occupying her waking and her sleeping dreams so fully as it had once done, and had subdued her affection down to what might now, with some truth, perhaps, have been called the affection of a sister. Serene in her sense of duty towards her parents and her friends, Lucy met

his approach with a countenance sparkling with unconcealed happiness; and she expressed, in words that came from the very heart, her delight at this unexpected meeting. "I never liked, Mr. Ellis, to say all I thought before people, even before my father and my mother themselves; but now that we are alone, I pray to Heaven to bless you and yours, in your own country or in foreign parts, all your life. Your goodness to me has been beyond all gratitude; and sometimes, remember, sir, on the Sabbaths, that there is one praying for you in the kirk o' Holylee."

Edward Ellis was little more experienced in this life than Lucy Forester herself; and as he ventured to kiss those soft blue eyes that, as they smiled upon him, swam with misty tears, he felt that she was dearer to him than he knew in her simplicity, and not to be parted from forever, without an indefinite despondency and distress. It seemed to him as if Lucy had grown nearer to woman's height and form since the night he had met her at the linn: that her countenance had lost something of its more childish prettiness, but had gained unspeakably in the expression of intelligence and feeling; and that even her voice was tuned to a deeper softness, that thrilled to his very heart. Neither had that month's residence at the Hirst been thrown away upon one so quick to perceive and learn: an unconscious air of grace, beyond what is native to the cottage, was visible over her demeanor; and in her dress — still suitable to the Shepherdess of Bracken Braes — the name by which he had loved to call her, there was a rustic elegance, no doubt finely imitated, or rather inspired, from that of Emma Cranstoun. Like a bird, too, escaped from a happy confinement, which it had no wish to leave, but still rejoicing in its new found liberty, Lucy once more felt elated in the open air of the braes, and now bounded along the heather, not so lightly indeed as not to bend down the purple fruit stalks — for that is done by the leveret and the lapwing — but so lightly and so quickly too, that it was not without some effort that Edward Ellis, who was esteemed active even

among the hill-side shepherds, kept pace with her glad-some career.

But they stood together by a little spring, known only to hunters and shepherds, overshadowed by a rock, whose base was covered with briar, broom, and bracken, and from whose cleft summit grew one solitary drooping birch tree. "Lucy, I am about to leave Holylee; I know not if for ever. No — no — not for ever; yet it may be years before I return to visit Mr. Kennedy and your father. A change has been suddenly made in the plan of my education, and to-morrow I go away. Will you accept a few keepsakes? Never again shall I meet with so sweet a maiden as Lucy Forester, nor one whom I love so well." Lucy had scarcely power to reply; but, with a faltering voice and trembling hand, she accepted them, and, after a few inarticulate words of affection, put them, without looking at what they were, into her bosom.

Edward Ellis knew not what was the nature of his feelings, nor what ought now to be his conduct. His boyish passion, at least delightful affection for Lucy Forester had, for nearly a year past, been growing with his growth; and now that he had even expressed it, he felt as if Lucy were betrothed to him by her kind acceptance of his love gifts. But what could that word "betrothed" mean, between him, a mere boy, and the daughter, still younger, of a man in Michael Forester's humble situation of life? Again he fixed his gazing eyes upon her, and her beauty was more and more irresistible. "When I return, Lucy, after a few years, I shall find you married to Isaac Mayne, the famous scholar." — "Never, never." And Lucy, unrestrained by shame or pride, now wept bitterly; for thoughts over which she had no power came in a tumult into her heart, and almost stopped its beatings, quick and strong as they had for some moments been in that sudden colloquy. There had been a dream enveloping her, which yet she had not known to be a dream, till now she saw it dissolving with all its enchantments. Now had she the first agonizing insight into her own heart, and into many feelings that lay couched

there, strong as life itself — feelings that had been rising there in rapid growth every hour since that travel, side by side with Edward Ellis, beneath the moon and stars. A sudden gladness was breathing over her soul — an intimation given that grief is a guest in every human breast — a voice whispering that she must forbid that glee in which she had revelled from the first morning light — that she must tame the fairy flight of those footsteps over the daisied green — that the laughter indulged to childhood must be now restrained — and that tears, or a calmness more sorrowful than tears, must often now subdue the smiles that had hidden her eyes, as it were, in their own kindling light. Something was to be removed soon, sudden, and for ever, that, unknown to herself, had been the chief bliss of life. Her brother, Edward, was no more to visit Bracken Braes! yet, even in that fit of grief, her heart acknowledged him to be her brother; for what affection could be more sisterly, pure, and irreproachable? What although a few sobs were heard! Yet was that affection not to cease — not to be utterly extirpated — but by absence and separation kept down within the heart, till reason and religion should overmaster it, before affection became love, and love trouble, and then the whole of life, by night and by day, in the lonesome glen, or the crowded House of God, infested by one dream never to be broken — stronger even than piety or superstition, and coloring all the humblest incidents of life with one hue, till the soul, formerly free in its wandering innocence, should be enslaved at last beneath the bondage of one unrelenting passion.

A shepherd came up, unperceived, to the Hawkstane Spring; and, relieved by this interruption, Edward and Lucy accompanied him down to the Heriot Water. The presence of an indifferent person soon calms even the strongest emotion, and, before they reached Bracken Braes, the brother and sister, or, if it must be so, the youthful lovers, were, if not cheerful, almost again happy.

Mr. Kennedy had been there only an hour before, and had acquainted them with Mr. Ellis' intended departure

next morning. Every one was, if possible, kinder and more tenderly respectful to the noble youth than they had ever intentionally been before; and when, at last, he reluctantly rose to go, not without a choked voice and tears in his eyes, Michael Forester stood up and blessed him with a fervent voice. As for the rest, they were unable to speak; and, when they found that Edward Ellis was indeed gone, they wondered how they could have suffered him to depart without expressions of greater affection.

Agnes said to Lucy that she seemed fatigued with her walk, and desired her to retire to rest. She was fain to escape to her little lonely room, and weep there unobserved. The Lady of the Hirst, as some thought, in a dying state — Mary Morrison unhappy — and Edward Ellis gone away forever! But her prayers calmed her heart; and, in little more than an hour, when Aunt Isabel slipped into her room to give her the usual farewell kiss for the night, Lucy Forester was asleep, and her face as tranquil as that of a child in its cradle.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE morning on which Lucy was to leave home for a whole winter, rose bright and beautiful, and all the family assembled cheerfully under the plane tree to bid her a happy farewell. Her parents were the proudest people in the whole world; but their's was a pride indulged in profoundest gratitude to the Giver of all Mercies. Their child was beloved over all the parish, and in every house she had friends; but she was now going to become the chosen companion of her whose very smiles were a blessing; and they felt that, in case of their own death, Lucy would have an asylum at the Hirst, where the orphan could well repay her benefactress for the protection of

her innocence. Therefore, so far from its looking like a parting scene, every face kindled with pleasure as at a return. Michael stood with his calm countenance in the morning light, turned affectionately towards his child, as happy as any man in existence. Agnes had herself assisted Lucy in dressing, and regarded her with a mother's admiring eyes, as her beauty shone with a more joyful lustre, in the consciousness of her neatly ordered array, and the anticipation of Emma Cranstoun's embrace. Aunt Isobel said, that she now loved Martha so well, that she would never miss Lucy; but reminded her, at the same time, with a hand fondly laid on her bosom, that once a-week had she promised to see them all at Bracken Braes, and never to miss a single Sabbath at the kirk of Holylee. Martha was sincerely happy at her kind cousin's good fortune, and expressed her happiness in her usual homely language. So away danced Lucy across the hills — her last kiss, and her last whisper — perhaps a tear — having been given as his due to her blind father.

"Where now is Edward Ellis?" thought Lucy, with a sigh, as she glided up and down the solitary places — the rocks and braes, the mosses and the coppice woods, through which he had accompanied her but a few weeks ago. With something like pain and reluctance, she turned aside to the little shaded spring, on whose mossy brink they had sat and conversed so affectionately, like brother and sister. That pleasant dream was vanished; the same blue unclouded sky was reflected in the water; but a dead silence lay around; and that delightful voice, and those beaming eyes, were gone, and forever. Lucy took from her bosom some of the small memorials of his affection, which, for reasons she scarcely knew, she had always concealed from every eye, and unconsciously put them to her lips. "God bless him all his days," was the prayer she breathed, as she returned the trifles to the fair warmth of her breast, which, in a few minutes, beat with all its wonted tranquillity.

It was a clear October day, the sky perfectly settled, the air pure as pure might be, and a slight frost, beautiful as dew, lying yet unmelted, over the discolored heather.

Lucy looked back to the happy parting below the plane tree, and forwards to the Hirst, and all sad thoughts either faded away, or were tinged with the joyfulness of a hopeful spirit. "Why sit singing there, sweet robin-redbreast, on a briary stone pillar in the moors? The summer days are all over and gone, and in another month may be coming the snow. Away, sweet robin-redbreast! — away to Bracken Braes, and trill that bit short merry sang o' thine frae the roof o' the barn, till not a leaf is left on our plane tree; and then keep hopping about the door, and in and out of the window, as you have done for seven winters."

Lucy was now nearly half way to the Hirst; for she was standing on a small eminence, called the Gowan Green, where Mary Morrison and she had often sat together for hours in their plaids, both in gloom and in sunshine. Here they had often waited for each other, on those days when it was known that Lucy was going to the Hirst; and, when not lucky enough to meet, each betokened her disappointment by a bunch of heather or wild flowers laid on the middle of that platform. It was not easy to imagine a place more solitary. No streamlets here murmured along the bases of the hills that came close together, without any intervening valleys, however narrow; but, just below the eminence, lay a little lake or tarn, not much larger than a pond, self-fed, and black with its moorland water. The long heather quite surrounded it, except on the side of the Gowan Green, which sloped away down to the margin, with its short smooth pasture. A number of large loose stones — for they could hardly be called rocks — lay here and there upon the water edge, and a few birch trees were sprinkled among the stunted hazles. There were no features belonging to the scene that could be called beautiful; yet, on a fine day, the lonesome place was pleasant in its silence, and, in spring or early summer, there was constantly here the sweet fragrance of whins, broom, and briar, with which was intermingled that of many unnoticed wild flowers, as well as that of the lady fern, and of the birches,

some of which, eaten down by the sheep, were not much taller than that graceful plant. Lucy and Mary had once passed a whole summer Sabbath here, without any interruption, from morning to night. It so happened, that there had been no Divine service, either at Holylee or the Ferns; and here the two happy creatures had agreed to pass the whole day, reading their Bibles, singing hymns in the wilderness, and talking over all the concerns of their young and innocent life.

Ewebank, the house of Mary Morrison, was not very far off; and Lucy, knowing how early in the morning it yet was, resolved to surprise her by a visit before, perhaps, her hearth was kindled. Looking down upon the tarn, behold, upon the stony edge of the water, she saw a female figure, with her face covered with her hands, and a man standing beside her, apparently in great agitation. The figure lifted up its face for a moment, and she knew that it was Mary Morrison. The man paced to and fro, a short distance, and ever and anon stood close beside Mary, with violent gesticulations, and attitudes bespeaking rage and hatred. At length he seized Mary by the hair, who fell down on her knees, and clasped her hands together in supplication. In his right hand there seemed to be a large stone, picked up from the edge of the tarn; and all at once Lucy knew that he was about to be a murderer. The dead silence of the lonesome place, and the furious looks of the ruffian, quailed Lucy's heart within her, and her first impulse was to fly back towards Bracken Braes, or sink down where she stood, in concealment among the heather; but her love for meek Mary Morrison, the first and best friend of her youth, prevailed, and, uttering a wild cry, she flew down the hill side towards the tarn, and in a few moments was at her side. Mary fixed her eyes upon her friend with a wild look, and then upon him whose hand had suddenly let go its grasp of the wretched creature's hair, and said, quakingly — "O Mark Thornhill! Mark Thornhill! have pity upon us — murder us not; for we are baith young, and, as for me, sair need hae I o' repentance." The stone fell from his right hand — the paleness of fear seemed to

pass over the deadly scowl of wrath — and his knees knocked against each other, in the sudden remorse of an unacted crime. But still an evil demon kept whispering in his ear, that Mary and Lucy were yet in the power of the criminal. Mary Morrison, who had felt that her last hour was come, had not strength to rise up from her knees, but sunk down altogether, and lay insensible among the hard flints of the beach. For a short time, not a word was uttered ; but all was silent in the fear of death that still overshadowed that solitary place.

Lucy knew nothing of the dreadful mystery in which she had all at once been involved ; but her courage did not desert her, and she beseeched Mark Thornhill — for she caught his name in Mary's indistinct supplications — to look upon them both without anger, and that God would forgive and reward him for his pity. That hand which had been clenched to do a deed of death, could not now have hurt a hair of Mary Morrison's head : it was quelled by the sudden beauty of that fearless innocence coming upon him, as if from heaven, to save him from perdition. He had received a reprieve from crime. Mary ventured to lift up her face from the sand, and saw that he was not relentless. "Swear — swear that you are not my wife — and that you will never claim me as your husband." — "I swear it," said Mary, and again bowed down her head. Her betrayer moved slowly and sullenly away — and, disappearing over the Gowan Green, left Mary and Lucy alone on the brink of the Ouzel Loch.

Guilt and its miseries had hitherto been to Lucy Forester like the words of a strange tongue. And now nothing distinct — nothing that could be borne to be thought of, had entered her mind. But there lay meek Mary Morrison, ashamed to look her in the face, and uttering no words but these — "This will break my father's heart — this will break my father's heart. O Lucy ! gang away to the Hirst, and leave me here to die ; for when you ken what I am now, your eyes will smile on me never mair ; and yet I surely think they will weep for me when I am dead and buried in sin, and

shame, and sorrow!" Lucy was weeping for her already; nor had these dismal words any power to deaden her affection. She assisted Mary to rise from that cruel bed, and in a little while was sitting with an arm round her neck, where they had so often sat and sang in their joy — on a knoll in the centre of the Gowan Green.

There was for a long time sobbing and sighing, and then dead silence. Lucy was the first to speak. "Mary, Mary, will you hear me? Well, then, here before our Father which is in heaven, and Him who died for us, do I upon my knees say unto you, that I will never forsake you — that I will not only pity you, and pray for you night and day, but I will love you better, far better than ever: let others do as they may, I at least will be the same to you as ever: yes, Mary, I will love you beyond all living creatures but my father and mother. If I do not, may the gates of yonder blue skies never be opened to me by the hands of God's holy angels!"

Mary Morrison was yet too young to be sick of life. Solitary and, but for Lucy, friendless as that life had been, still it had too much sunshine to be exchanged, without dismay, for the darkness of the grave. Even shame, she began to think, might be borne, if Lucy would but continue to look on her with unaverted and unchanged eyes in her disgrace. "Perhaps even my father may be brought to forgive me!" But that was a transient thought; for, although she loved her father, she feared that forgiveness was not in his nature for such a crime. Suddenly her heart burned within her, and, kneeling down beside Lucy, who was still on her knees, she exclaimed — "God will bless you, Lucy, for this! but hear me now, and believe me when I say that I am not so guilty as people will think. I will keep my oath, Lucy, for you heard me swear; but to you who saw so much, I may speak without being foresworn. Guilty as I am, yet in the sight of Heaven am I his wife, and Mark Thornhill is my husband! Yes, Lucy, we were married before two witnesses, and Mark gave me a paper, saying I was his wife; but, waes me! he does not care for me

now — he has sent the witnesses out of the way ; and, as for the writing, he tore it out of my bosom this dreadful morning, and it is destroyed for ever. Naebody will ever believe now that we were married ; and, Oh ! how can I face my father ? ”

In a few hours — for hours indeed passed by, and the sun was high in heaven — Mary Morrison had told Lucy her history over and over again many, many times, and she began to feel even some relief from her conscience in her friend’s unabated affection. She even ventured to think it possible that Lucy’s father and mother would not altogether forsake her in her shame — for shame there was indeed to be, worse than all other evils except death. But then she thought of her own father, and her heart died within her ; for she knew too well that, as soon as she confessed to him, never again would she be allowed to darken the door of Ewebank.

At last they parted — Mary to her father’s, and Lucy (for one night, and one night only) to the Hirst ; for she was determined to tell everything she durst to her father, and beseech him to go over in the morning to Ewebank.



CHAPTER XXXI.

Lucy left the Hirst before morning had entirely dimmed the stars, and had to tap for admission into the house, at the window of her father’s room, for sleep yet held all the family at Bracken Braes. The story she had to tell about Mary Morrison greatly disturbed her parents and Aunt Isobel ; and, for a while, Lucy feared that her unhappy friend was to be deserted in her misery. Michael, Agnes, and Isobel were all too sensible of their own failings, and frailties, and too religiously impressed with an habitual sense of the utter weakness of human nature, to judge and condemn sternly the errors or sins of their

fellow Christians. But this was a case that it was necessary to understand perfectly before they could decide what was their duty. They were bound by love, nature, and religion, to protect their daughter from all stain of pollution; and to sever her inexorably from her tenderest friendships, rather than suffer her to incur any danger, however slight, of being contaminated by evil example. They all loved Mary Morrison, and could not easily believe in her guilt; but they knew how many shades of sin darken the actions of us mortal creatures, and perhaps that poor girl, although more the object of pity than blame, had, nevertheless, greivously erred. From Lucy's story, they saw enough to determine them all to give Mary their compassion, their condolence, and their support in the agony of her affliction, in so far as that could be done, without violating the awful sanctity of the moral law, and thereby tainting, perhaps, the very atmosphere in which their own Lucy breathed. They all remembered Mary's meekness and modesty — her unrepining gentleness under the severities of a cruel parent — her grateful disposition — indeed almost too grateful — to them at Bracken Braes; for even the commonest courtesies and kindnesses, and that deep sense of religion, which more constantly than with any one they knew, influenced her whole conduct and demeanor, and made her, without excepting even their own Lucy, the most perfect model of a Christian daughter.

Lucy was altogether overcome by the thought that her father and mother might be about to leave Mary Morrison to her fate. True to her promise to that unfortunate creature, she had not disclosed all she knew, and thus her pleadings for her beloved friend had been in their most passionate earnestness, perplexing and imperfect. At last she hinted that there was a secret that must not be revealed, and by degrees her father came to understand something of its nature, and of the obligation Lucy had come under to observe silence. The clear and high understanding of Michael Forester was not to be deceived by the sophistry which fear and shame had whispered to the hearts of his daughter and her friend.

The truth must be told, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, else God, the Searcher and Judge of all hearts, would not be well pleased. Promises and oaths, by whomsoever extorted, under such circumstances, must be given to the winds, and a full confession made before God and man of the sin, and of the aggravating or palliating circumstances with which it might have been attended. There was no speck, no dimness on the eye of Michael Forester's mind, and he saw that here there was selfish, and licentious, and cruel guilt, trampling upon abused and terrified innocence. "This," said the blind man, "with the blessing of God, must not be, and I feel myself called upon to be the minister of his Eternal Justice."

What tears poured down the pale face of Agnes, and what fear quaked within her heart, when Lucy narrated all that had happened at the Ouzel Loch! "Manifestly the arm of mercy was over our child, Michael, else had that bonnie head of her's been laid cruelly in the dust." Lucy was too anxious about Mary Morrison to hear even the just commendation of herself, although coming from the lips of those whom it was the sole object of her life to make happy, and she only exclaimed — "You will not forsake Mary now, father, should she be driven from Ewebank? O will you — say that you will receive her into our ain house; for, unless we do so, her heart will break, and, before the end of the week, Mary Morrison will be in her grave." — "Yes, my Lucy, if she needs it, the door of Bracken Braes shall be open to her; nor do I fear although her head should even lie on the same pillow with that of my own child."

Michael and Lucy were not long in setting out for Ewebank. Few words were spoken as they crossed the solitary hills and valleys, for Michael was settling in his own mind all that ought to be said to the father of Mary Morrison. On reaching Ewebank, Lucy saw him walking about distractedly, with his gray head uncovered, in a small garden close to the hut. A frown was settled on his forehead and all about his eyes as firmly as if it had been their constant expression — his cheeks seemed rigid,

and his white lips quivered as in convulsions. In a low voice, Lucy described to her father his agitated state. "This is, indeed, a distressing affliction, Abraham, and I feel for you; for I, too, have but an only child. I have ventured over to pray with you — to comfort you in any way one Christian may comfort another; and especially, my worthy friend, to inform you of something that goes far to prove your daughter's innocence." — "May the curse of God cleave to her — the wages of sin are death!" and he again paced to and fro with clenched hands, and eyes uplifted to heaven in savage supplication. "May I ask where she is, Abraham? but I beseech you, by Him who died for us on the Tree, not to curse the daughter of Alice Gray!" That name rooted the angry sufferer to the ground; but, again, he tore himself away, and cried aloud — "Yes — I curse her, and may she be cursed, for she has covered these white hairs with shame;" and he flung down a handful of his long silvery locks, and trampled upon them with his feet. Lucy was terrified at the sight, and, retiring to a little distance, sat down upon a bank. "Where is your daughter, Abraham? for I feel as if God sent me here to reconcile you unto her." — "Call her not my daughter, for daughter she is none of mine; neither know I where the prostitute has hidden herself from my wrath — in the moor, or in the mosses, or the Ouzel Loch. Never again may these eyes behold her in life." And at these words he burst out into hideous laughter, all drenched in a flood of tears, and fell down with great violence to the earth.

Michael heard the fall, and Lucy was coming to his assistance, when, issuing silently as a ghost from the birch wood, the edge of which came almost close upon the garden, Mary Morrison was already on her knees, with her father's head supported on her bosom. "This is my doing, Mr. Forester — all my wicked doing: you had far better leave me to my death, after you have recovered my father. O that he could be taken over to Bracken Braes, and comforted back again into his reason. As for me, it is but just that I should die. But see — see, Lucy, his eyes are opening, and now he shuts them

upon me, for I am hateful in my sin, and most loathsome to my father's soul. I must hide myself again in the thicket among the briars: if I touch him, perhaps he will kill me. O, Mr. Forester! invite him over to Bracken Braes, and tell him that I have fled out of the parish, to pollute his eyes never mair on this side o' the grave." Mary Morrison then started up, and disappeared.

That paroxysm had in some measure allayed the passion in Abraham Morrison's spirit, by the weakness which it induced over his entire frame. He almost seemed as if a palsy had stricken him; but, by and by, he revived, and in a sort of stupor walked into the house, followed by Michael and Lucy. Unconscious of his actions, he sat down as usual in his chair by the hearth side, on which no fire was burning, and his hand falling violently upon that book which speaks only of mercy and forgiveness, he again uttered an indistinct curse upon his child. It appeared that he had been reading the Bible; but some evil spirit had turned over the leaves, and the balm of consolation was to him poison, bitter and mortal. Lucy stood trembling behind her father, and then said in a whisper — "I will go to Mary in the wood."

Perhaps Abraham Morrison knew not that any one was in the room, for now his words seemed to be uttered as if to himself in solitude. "If ever I forgive her, may I be unforgiven! If she dies in childbirth, and I shed a tear, may it sink like a spark of hell into my heart!" Then gazing on Michael Forester, he started up, and cried with a loud voice — "What brought you hither, Mr. Forester? Go home and watch your own child — for young as she is, and with a smile upon her face, how know you that she may not be a sinner, and up to the lips in pollution?" — "Abraham Morrison," said the blind man, standing like a prophet, with his outstretched arm, and tall figure straight and still in its majesty of command — "Abraham Morrison, remember that you are a father, and that none other but the hand of the Almighty can break that bond that ties you, all the days of your life, to your child. Be she even guilty, the voice of the

Great God commands you to forgive her; for, in his sight, you are far guiltier than she. Yes, Abraham Morrison, your sins have been many, and they have been done under the shadow of gray hairs: her's have been few, and this—I know it well—this is the poor creature's birthday, and she is but seventeen years! But hearken unto me, Abraham, I command you to hearken unto me—your daughter's heart is unpolluted, and if her father deserts her, then, this very night, shall she sleep in my own Lucy's arms. Grant, O God! thy blessing on this afflicted house." And Michael Forester stood a little while with his head gently bowed, and his hands uplifted in the attitude of prayer.

It is in the power of a strong and stubborn heart, not only to harden itself against all natural affection, but to triumph in what it strives within itself to consider in the light of a sacrifice. So was it now with Abraham Morrison. He knew well—it was not possible to keep that knowledge from his conscience—that he had denied his daughter all the harmless amusements and pastimes of youth; that he had closed his heart against her in all his domestic hours, finding at last a sullen satisfaction in tyrannizing over the gentle, and obedient, and unrepining creature, whom he could not but love; that he had often left her quite alone in that solitary hut for long days together, and uncared for and unguarded among the hills; and now that evil had befallen her innocence, instead of looking into his own unfatherly conduct, he steeled himself against her in his very remorse, and took refuge in the excommunication of his own flesh and blood from the privileges of nature. It was all in vain for Michael Forester to exculpate her, or palliate her transgression. She herself had, the night before, told her own pitiable story; but, under the terror of that oath, had said not a word against her betrayer and her murderer. The stern old man adhered cruelly to her own confession, and all Michael's words rebounded back as if from a rock. He too who thus unmercifully judged his daughter's transgression, thought far more of himself, and the shame that had fallen upon him, than of her guilt in the eyes of her Maker, or

even of the Eternal's goodness to his fallen creatures. The eyes and the tongues of men were to him not endurable in their scorn and condemnation; and his pride wished that, rather than this disgrace, his daughter had been drowned, or had perished in fire. He had borne ill his many worldly misfortunes, and although his integrity had been unimpeached, he repined in his poverty. His crops had been oftener withered or blasted, he thought, than those of his neighbors; diseases came among his cattle more frequently than among theirs; and nothing prospered about Ewebank ever since he had been its tenant. There had always been an evil eye upon the place, and now the whole phials of wrath had been poured out, and he was ready to curse God and die. "Go home, Mr. Forester — go home with your daughter, and leave me in my misery. As for her, if she cross my threshold again, may she drop down dead upon the floor."

Lucy came into the room, and, taking her father's hand to lead him out, they left the hut unnoticed by the wretched man, who sat with his eyes sullenly fixed upon the dead ashes on the hearth. They entered the birch wood by a small glade, and there Mary Morrison was lying upon the ground. "O father!" said Lucy, "we must take Mary with us, for she has been all night long in this very place, afraid even of her life, so fiercely did her father rage against her; and if left here, she will surely die." Michael took her into his arms, and kissed her cheek, but he could not see, what Lucy wept to behold, the mark of violence upon her face, no doubt from her father's hand, although Mary had said not a word of that cruelty, and beseeched them both to forgive him, for that her misconduct had driven him to distraction.

They once more passed near the door of the hut, but nothing stirred within; and Mary, who was almost helpless from her sufferings, permitted herself to be taken away from Ewebank, and, without speaking a single word all the way, found herself at Bracken Braes.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LUCY'S visit to the Hirst was necessarily delayed, at least for a few days, till the mental agonies of Mary Morrison might be assuaged by the tenderest sympathies of those who seemed indeed now to be her only friends on earth. Not a word of forgiveness came from her own unrelenting father, and she was indeed an orphan. Few friends had she ever had to cheer her solitary life, and those few deserted her in her disgrace. Abraham Morrison was but a poor man, and therefore people, whom his disagreeable character had repelled from Ewebank, had no selfish inducement now to offer any comfort in his affliction. He became an object of blame rather than of pity, although both feelings might well have been entertained towards him; and his daughter's fall was, at every fireside, laid to the charge of his austerity or indifference. This Abraham knew, and, while his heart acknowledged that the charge was true, yet he sullenly regarded those by whom it was made, and his conscience hardened itself in pride against those haunting visitations that come upon the lonely hours of every man that forgets or violates any of the great natural duties. He continued obdurate in his unrelenting misery within the gloom of his hut, and not one of the few neighbors who had gone to see him repeated the visit, for they saw that their interference only served to embitter the poison on which he fed. He took an old pauper into his house, stricken with many of the infirmities of age, but who, silent in her deafness and indifference to life, could yet bring water from the well, dig up vegetables from the garden, prepare his meals, which now he scarcely asked God to bless, and make that bed on which he had lain with open eyes ever since his daughter had sunk into sin and shame; for from these words he would not depart, and dwelt upon them till his whole mind was exclusively filled with hideous and dreadful images.

Meanwhile, various judgments were passed on the un-

fortunate girl and her friends at Bracken Braes. It would sometimes seem as if the human heart, even in a state of comparative innocence and simplicity, found a pleasure in the worst distresses that can befall our common nature; and eyes that ought to overflow with compassion, are often averted from suffering with a coldness that is indeed absolute cruelty. The young feared to pity Mary Morrison, lest their own purity might be suspected; and the old lost, in their anxiety for the virtue of their own children, the common feelings of humanity for her who had deviated from its paths. The censure was generally loud, the pity in a whisper; and when, in a week or two, gentler judgments and feelings arose, people were beginning to lose an interest in what did not immediately concern themselves; and Mary Morrison's name, if not forgotten, was unpronounced, as if by general agreement. Neither was the conduct of Michael Forester and his wife allowed to pass without many comments — some of them by no means favorable; but his commanding character silenced open blame, and Michael was not a man to heed the opinions of the timid or uninformed, in a case where his duty shone clearly before him, and where nature and religion alike bade him shelter the orphan head. He did by no means despise the opinions of his fellow-creatures; but his conscience was his monitor, and a monitor enlightened by the Bible. Therefore, no misgivings assailed the constancy of his protecting affection towards poor Mary Morrison; and he determined to see her vindicated before the eyes of men, as he believed her to be nearly so in the eyes of God.

The intensity of Lucy's love for Mary Morrison rendered her wholly indifferent to any painful rumors accidentally overheard; and she also reposed a perfect reliance on the judgment of her parents and Aunt Isobel, which would always have reconciled her conscience to anything they approved. But when she was given to understand that the Lady of the Hirst no longer desired her attendance, then indeed a pang pierced her heart, and she wept sorely over the loss of such friendship. Emma Cranstoun

was the very soul of candor, intelligence, and pity; but, to one in her situation, the knowledge of what is transacting in the houses of the poor must often come in baneful whispers, and, in cases of error or misfortune, can scarcely fail of being perplexing and imperfect. Lucy herself she had not seen; and with one so very young it would not have been possible to converse on such a subject. Emma Cranstoun, therefore, heard the truth with every accompaniment of falsehood, even from those who did not mean either to deceive or traduce. The unhappy girl's stay at Bracken Braes she felt to place an insuperable impediment in the way of her friendship with Lucy Forester; and while she still continued to think with affection and gratitude of all her services, and with almost unimpaired admiration of her character, nevertheless a necessity was imposed upon her to release Lucy from her engagement at the Hirst.—Such another attendant on her sick-bed she well knew was nowhere to be found; but she could not in this matter run counter, not only to the determined resolution of Mrs. Ramsay, but to the implied advice and open remonstrances of all her other friends.

The loss of the lady's love was to Lucy like the darkening of the daylight. For several years she had felt her own nature elevated by constant communion with such a perfect being as, in her enthusiasm, she not very erroneously considered Emma Cranstoun; and to be not only severed from that communion, but thought no longer worthy of it, sunk Lucy in her own esteem; and, deprived of that stay, she seemed to sink away back into an inferior condition, such as had contented her childhood before that beautiful and beneficent creature had ever been seen at Bracken Braes. But for whose sake had she sustained this great loss? For meek Mary Morrison, with whom she had never had one unkind word — with whom she had sat in the same plaid a hundred times before she ever knew that the Lady of the Hirst was in existence — whom she had called her sister, and, indeed, loved as if they had lain in one cradle — and towards whom, at all times, profoundest pity had mingled an in-

expressible charm with the joyfulness of affection. Lucy now turned back her heart to the past, and remembered many, many words and looks, during several years, which she had but little attended to; but which now affected her with the knowledge of unhappiness borne uncomplainingly by the poor girl whose mother was dead, and whose father was little disposed to supply her loss. She wondered how she could ever have been so blind as not to see Mary's wretchedness at home, and thought now how much better it would have been to have wept along with her than to have talked merrily and laughed too in the sunshine of bygone summer days. But now amends will be made for all such oversight — and sooner will the bird forget its nest, than Lucy to supply hourly comfort to her sister. Mary Morrison had never spoken much even in her happier days — for gentle smiles and affectionate eyes filled up the pauses of their artless talk; but now not a smile was seen — those eyes, as it was fitting they should do, rested on the ground, and shunned the sunshine — and her pale lips were mute, except when a sigh would have its utterance, and her bosom heaved in agony to think that one human being could have had the heart to use another as Mark Thornhill had used her, without pity or repentance, and yet knowing all the time that there was a God in heaven!

But it was not her own loss alone that affected Lucy, when she thought of the Lady of the Hirst. “For what hands can tend her so carefully as mine would have done? — what eyes will open at midnight so readily as mine did at the slightest whisper, or whenever my beloved benefactress moved her head upon the pillow? No — not one in all Scotland could serve her like me; or, like me, go with her, if she chose, to the uttermost parts of the earth!” Then, something like pride — a stirring of that elevated spirit which virtue breathes into the simplest and humblest heart, and which may prostrate itself wholly before Him alone from whose throne it comes — rose to Lucy's support, and made her lift up her head undepressed, with all its golden ringlets, till again the lady lying languid, and faint, and feverish on her couch — perhaps all

alone in that vast and solitary hall — appeared before her; and then fain would Lucy have knelt before that image, and beseeched her once more to restore to favor the servant once beloved, and now more devoted than ever, although the light of that countenance was, alas, withdrawn!

In a month's time, the heart of Mary Morrison, in some degree, revived. Nothing but guilt need be permanently miserable; and that faith which she had learnt from her infancy, and which, with all his other lamentable faults, her father had venerated, outwardly at least, before his daughter, was not found a cold and barren creed, now that she read her Testament with eyes that dropped tears on every page. Truly parental tenderness now met her on every occasion, however small, on which it could be shewn. So much affection, she thought, surely could not thus be felt by the good for her, if she were quite worthless. No restraint was laid on her intercourse with Lucy; and, above all things else, that thought would comfort her even on the bed of death. "Michael and Agnes Forester let their innocent child sleep in my bosom: and, O merciful God! forgive him, and inspire with another heart, who has fixed upon it a stain of pollution; for I thought that I was his wife, and my sin was more in ignorance than from a corrupted heart; so, at least, I humbly hope to be judged at the great day."

The unprincipled man who had thus betrayed the unsuspecting and unprotected innocence of Mary Morrison, had left the country, and no one knew where he had gone; but Michael Forester communicated all her case to Mr. Kennedy, and they did not doubt that it would be in their power some day to establish proofs of her marriage. Meanwhile, Mary accompanied the family to church; and, although on the first Sabbath the trial was terrible, and she would fain have sunk and disappeared down among the bones, and skulls, and rotten coffins of the grave, when she felt hundreds of eyes, all dreadfully dazzling, upon her face, and searching pitilessly into her soul; yet that coarse curiosity could not sustain itself against one so perfectly humbled in contrition, and sitting

between such friends as Agnes and Lucy. On the fourth Sabbath, the few looks that sought her out, were of the most compassionate character, and sufficient to shew that innocence will ultimately triumph, even in this world, dark and disastrous as may be its days of sufferings. Her father belonged to another congregation; but he was never out of Mary's sight during the whole time of service.

Although Emma Cranstoun did not ask Lucy to come to her at the Hirst, yet she knew too thoroughly the characters of all at Bracken Braes, to treat them with neglect or displeasure. Many kind inquiries still came, and Lucy had even received two or three letters, expressed almost with her former free affection. Lucy could not but look forward, in her hopeful nature, to being restored some day to the place she had left in her bosom, and beside her bed; and, "perhaps, even when the whole truth is brought to light, my conduct may be approved, and Mary Morrison forgiven." But the most alarming rumors respecting the lady's health were now prevalent over the whole parish. Mr. Kennedy, evidently, spoke as if his fears were greatly increased; and Lucy often awoke in the middle of the night, shrieking out that the Lady of the Hirst was dying or dead. More than once, too, had she dreamed of recovery and reconciliation; and, on awaking, felt heaven, with all its ecstasy, changed in a moment into this mournful earth.

Unable to endure all this fear and all this love, Lucy resolved to go to the Hirst, and find entrance to that room which she had so often decked to please her mistress' eyes, and never in vain. She knew that her intrusion would cause no disturbance, and that, if turned away from the gate, her tears would drop to the ground in silence. No angry frown, she felt assured, would fall upon one who had so often sung, in Emma Cranstoun's hearing, hymns in praise of their God; and the gracious lady who had so often smiled upon her dutiful Lucy, and held her hand, when together they knelt down in prayer — the daughter of a long line of illustrious an-

cestry, and the child of a peasant, whose forefathers had all been dwellers beneath straw roofs — such a one would remember their pleasant devotion, and, for the sake of their common hopes of heaven, perhaps not refuse once more to take her back to her bosom. “Then, too,” thought Lucy, “I can judge for myself, if there be any change on her cheek for better or worse; but hope I will never resign, till I am forced to look at her grave!”

There was no unfilial disobedience in stealing away, one fine winter morning, with a hesitating hint that she was going to Ladyside, and directing her steps, as soon as she was out of sight, toward the Hirst. She soon found herself on one of those beautiful winding walks through the woods, where she had so often accompanied the lady farther and farther on into the solitude of the waterfalls. Winter had stripped the most of the trees, and the withered leaves rustled mournfully beneath her feet. But still there was sunshine; and, looking towards the hall, every window seemed on fire with its cheerful illumination. There she distinctly saw the plants at the window of the greenhouse; and they were bright, even at that distance, with a thousand blossoms. Nothing was there to hint of decay or death; and Lucy’s heart leaped within her, in the belief that many happy years might yet be in store for Emma Cranstoun.

Fearful as if she had been doing a thing that was wrong, Lucy glided up the steps that connected the greenhouse with the southern lawn, and opened the door, which she had often unfolded to the beams of the morning sunshine. She wasted not a look — or, if she did, it was hurried and indistinct — on the plants she had tended and trained; but, with a beating heart, ventured into the room where Emma Cranstoun used to have her couch; and there indeed was the lady lying as before, but with half shut eyes, that opened as the shadow fell on them; for Lucy’s feet were without a sound. Lucy stood trembling in the smile of recognition, bright, beaming, and benign as it ever had been, and, to the heart now relieved from fear, even more perfectly beauti-

ful in its forgiveness. "Come hither, my lovely and loving Lucy, come hither to my heart." And, although nothing filled her outstretched arms, the soft white hand fell upon Lucy's head, that leaned upon the couch, as the grateful creature knelt down and sobbed in her happiness, too mournful to be endured.

Emma Cranstoun gave orders that no one, not even Mrs. Ramsay, should disturb her; and listened, with the deepest interest, to Lucy's simple and innocent eloquence, when telling all she knew of the wickedness that had betrayed Mary Morrison. The power of truth was in every word, and Emma Cranstoun asked Lucy Forester's forgiveness. That request was something too overpoweringly affecting to a heart that looked up to her as to a superior being; and Lucy beseeched her to recall such words, for that it was impossible for her to do wrong, and that every one at Bracken Braes had all along said that, till Mary's character was cleared, no one from the family could ever dare to shew their face at the Hirst. "But last night I had a foretaste of this happiness in a dream, and will henceforth believe that dreams are sent from heaven."

Lucy knew that her benefactress must not be allowed to speak much in her exhausted condition, and feared that she had sorely wearied her by exciting too many feelings for Mary Morrison. "Say not so, my Lucy, for you have placed my pillow so, that the most delightful rest is over my whole frame, and that voice of thine is the best of all restoratives." All apprehension of displeasure now wore away, and Lucy kept her seat by the side of the couch, or obeyed the lady's bidding at word or sign, in all the little arrangements about the room, with the same noiseless alacrity that she had learned long ago, when first her father had been stricken blind; and that made her, indeed, in sober truth, a ministering angel at a sick-bed.

It was, however, impossible for Lucy not to see that the frame of her mistress was weaker and more emaciated than before, and that her voice had a fainter, almost a hollow, sound. Alive as she was to hope in all sorrow,

yet she never foolishly shut her eyes to the truth, merely because it was distressing; and the truth now too plainly was, that Emma Cranstoun was not so well as she had been a few weeks ago. Lucy, therefore, did not wait to be asked to remain at the Hirst, but implored permission. "If Mrs. Ramsay dislikes me, and still objects, on Mary's account, to my being here, O send for Mr. Kennedy, and ask his advice as to the propriety of your Lucy being again allowed to be your servant. Perhaps Mrs. Ramsay will not dislike or condemn it, if Mr. Kennedy says it is not wrong. 'Then my cousin Martha is one of the best-hearted, most obliging girls that ever was known, and, indeed, is far more useful about the house than I am, do what I will. They will miss me now less than ever; and, Oh! what a relief to poor Mary Morrison's heart to know that the Lady of the Hirst has taken me into her service once more, in spite of all that ever was said against her in her affliction and her innocence.'"

The snow was falling thickly, and the afternoon had become full of gusts—the tree-tops bending low, and their red leaves careering in eddies. Lucy wrote a letter, with her own hand, to her father; for she had always addressed him in her correspondence since she could write at all, telling, in a few words, that the Lady of the Hirst had forgiven them, even Mary Morrison herself; and, although Mrs. Ramsay's natural temper was not the best in the world, and her judgments not a little warped, yet her intentions were good, and, before night, she had brought herself to regard Lucy with not a little kindness. A good share of trouble, too, was about to be taken off her own hands; although, to do the good lady justice, she never grudged trouble, fond as she was of descanting on her meritorious services; and, having the sincerest affection for Emma, who, without sacrificing any of her own independence, always treated the old lady with respect, she was even happy to think that there was now a young person whom Emma loved constantly with her; so that she gave orders, with a pleasant countenance, about Lucy's bed, that had been removed, but was now soon wheeled, with its pretty curtains, into its niche in

the wall, and, to Emma's eye, gave the whole room an instant look of cheerfulness that already, in some measure, restored her heart.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

As soon as it was known that the Lady of the Hirst had restored Lucy Forester to her favor, and thereby declared her approbation of her father's conduct in the melancholy affair of Mary Morrison, that unfortunate creature's situation was regarded in a very different light by all the firesides in the parish. Innocence will be vindicated at last, and every heart that has been conscious of cruelty or injustice to a fellow creature, is afterwards fain to make amends by additional tenderness and commiseration. Mary was not long of discerning a decided change in the expression of almost all countenances; and life, that had for some time been a burden, was not only lightened, but a stealing sense of happiness came over her worn-out heart, and her eyes were able once more, not only to endure, but to enjoy the sunshine.

Michael Forester did not proceed rashly in his determination to establish proofs of Mary's marriage with Mark Thornhill, but he allowed the truth gradually to be brought out almost of its own accord. One of the witnesses, he found, had gone beyond seas; but the other, a woman of indifferent character, he had traced to Edinburgh; and there was a certainty of his bringing the nefarious conspiracy to light, when the hand of Providence itself was stretched out in the cause of the innocent. Mark Thornhill was stopped short in his wickedness by a mortal fever; and, on his dying bed, remorse urged him to a full confession. Mary Morrison he acknowledged to be his lawful wife; and, in a few days afterwards, she was a widow.

Released from ignominy and disgrace, Mary now yielded herself up to the deepest grief; for, in spite of all his merciless barbarity, she felt that she had still continued to love Mark Thornhill. His death-bed repentance, whatever others might think of its severity, was accepted of by her as far more than an atonement for all the sins he had committed against her peace; and had it pleased God to spare his life, she would have been willing to have been taken to his bosom, and to have shewn how perfect could be the forgiveness of a Christian wife. The time surely once was when he had loved her, nor could anything ever efface from her remembrance the impressions of his tenderness to her in the first season of their love, when, probably, he designed no evil, and spoke the truth, when he said that he loved her for her modesty and her innocence. A dreadful change had, indeed, ensued; and she had become the victim of a wickedness that he himself had not known to be in his heart, till gradually it had risen up in greater and greater power, and driven him, at last, to the very verge of inexpiable crime. Mary Morrison had been taught, and truly taught, by the stern Calvinism of her own father, that the human heart is desperately wicked; and, now that her husband was dead, she judged him in the light of that awful doctrine, and saw, in his miserable guilt, that of fallen and corrupted nature. Above all other considerations, he had now been called to judgment; and she humbly hoped, not without many inevitable, although, perhaps, unavailing prayers, that as great sinners as he may have been ransomed into the mercy of the Eternal.

But gracious nature would not suffer Mary to remain long utterly disconsolate. The calm of the grave — so very profound — soon began to inspire her with a congenial tranquillity; and the melancholy creature, not yet eighteen years of age, walked about the quiet retirement of Bracken Braes, in her widow's weeds, with a composure that promised a life of sufficient happiness to one so contented and resigned. Her early youth had suffered the sorrows that belong to advanced age; but, although the light of joy had been sorely darkened, it was not for-

ever eclipsed, and might yet shine upon her steadily, if not brightly, at Ewebank, in her father's house, if that door was again to be opened to one who ought never to have been driven from its shelter.

Abraham Morrison had shewn himself to be what everybody now called an unnatural father. But had he been really so, and had God frowned at all times upon his gray head since that evening when he cursed his child away from the hut in which she had been born? In that dark and disturbed tumult of many passions, He who formed the heart may have seen what was hidden from human eye, for he alone judges aright, in his omniscience, the secrets that wring the souls of the children of men. That unforgiving father had not been altogether deserted in his childless hut. Many a thousand times in the darkness of midnight, or the worse darkness of the unvisited day, had every shadow of anger left his wrinkled face, and every feeling of anger flown far away from his heart.

Tossed had his exhausted frame been in such solitary seasons, like a bark upon the sea, when every living thing has left the wreck. Often and often had he risen up, like one walking in his sleep, and implored God to send him back his child; kissed the pillow on which her once innocent cheek had lain, and recalled every curse he had ever imprecated against her, with tenfold destruction on his own unhappy head. But then evil whisperings came close by his ear from every corner of the dark dwelling; fingers pointed at him scornfully; and the eyes of the whole congregation, as they sat in God's own house, turned upon him, the father of her who had sold herself to sin and to shame. In his half waking dreams there was a hissing as of serpents; and a hand writing on the lowly walls, instigated him in his delirium to keep this outcast sinner under the pursuing vengeance of a father's ban. Then the long habits of an unindulgent, indeed an unforgiving spirit, strengthened the power of all these phantasms; and thus fighting against all the most sacred emotions and instincts, which were often victorious, and as often overcome, he had sunk into a sort of insanity, which is the more dreadful, because its victim believes himself

to be obeying, not only the law of nature, but the command of a superior and inexorable power.

Michael Forester knew the character of Mary's father well, and had not forgotten the last parting scene at Ewebank. Therefore, after her complete vindication, by the side of her husband's death-bed, he still advised her to remain with them at Bracken Braes till a fit time might come for reconciliation. Neighbors were told to step in upon Abraham now and then at Ewebank, and by their more free and cheerful manner of talking, to shew that a change was taking place in the opinions of all respecting his daughter. Ere long, something like the full truth was revealed to him by successive glimpses; and Michael at last ventured to send a message to him by a person whom he greatly respected, that he would, in a few days, come over to Ewebank, and he trusted not to leave it till he had convinced his friend that Mary, who had surely been a wife, and was now a widow, ought to be taken back, without any upbraidings, into her father's house.

Michael Forester chose the Sabbath day for this work of love and righteousness. Agnes and Isobel accompanied him to Ewebank; and they all three walked silently and solemnly into the room where Abraham was sitting, with the open Bible before him — and the old pauper reading her's likewise, in a nook, by herself — for a while unobserved of their entrance. Abraham, although too weak to walk to the kirk, even although his unhappy feelings had suffered him to do so, was decently clad in his Sabbath apparel, and, being prepared for a visit, received them with surprising fortitude. "I again ask a blessing upon this house," said Michael; and these few words were heard efficaciously in the silence. The aged attendant placed her spectacles in her Bible, and walked out of the hut. Then Abraham felt his conscience smite him like a death knell, for the presence of those who had received his daughter into their house when her father would have driven her out even into the winter's snow, dispelled all those distempered thoughts by which he had blinded his moral understanding, and he knew that he

had sinned against nature and against God. "My bairn will never forgive me, though meek Mary Morrison was ay the name she bore; for didna you see, Mr. Forester — no, you saw it not, for the Almighty, who burned out your eyes with his lightning, saved them from that pollution; but your Lucy saw it; and I wish you all to hear me confess it with my wicked gray hairs in the dust: your Lucy beheld this hand, which may yet wither in the unquenched fire, smite my daughter as she knelt before me — ay, smite her on the temples, till, without one groan, she stretched herself out like a corpse upon this very floor." At these words Abraham Morrison laid down his head in the white ashes on the hearth, and sprinkled them over it, saying — "Is this remorse, is this repentance, or must I feed the worm that never dies, and for me shall my Saviour have in vain been nailed upon the tree?"

No one moved; but they suffered the passion of the contrite man to take its course. Then said Isobel — "Fear not, my friend, but that this Sabbath shall indeed be unto thee a day of rest. Even at this very hour is the psalm perhaps rising to the throne of God from the kirk of Ferns, in which, although for some time absent, you have been for many long years a worshipper. In that congregation you will yet sit with Mary at your side, happier than you have been for many hundred Sabbaths; nor, Abraham, is your daughter even now far distant from you — she and Lucy are on the hill side, looking down upon the dwelling in which she long thought herself happy, and below whose roof, fain is she, with a loving heart, once more to return!"

Agnes had gone quietly out of the room when Abraham had given way to that fit of passion; and she now came back, but not unaccompanied; for Mary Morrison, in deep mourning, walked in with her and Lucy, and then advancing a few steps, stood before her father. There was no agitation on her countenance; for her soul was prepared for this meeting, and it had gone through such sorrows, that it was now found equal to any trial. She

came not to forgive, but to be forgiven; and, in a calm, low voice, asked if her father would take back to his bosom his repentant child. Her face was quite pale, but also quite happy; it did not seem that she trembled; and, as her father stood motionless, with his hands before his eyes, Mary walked up to him with wonderful composure, and, putting her arms round his neck, kissed his cheek almost as placidly as if on returning home from an annual visit to a friend's house, and then leaned upon his breast, half supporting and half supported by him who had held her up in baptism, joyful in the smiles of his first-born.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE winter sometimes passes away as if that season of the year had been imperceptibly blended with the autumn and the spring, and from December to April the earth lies with little diminution of its cheerful character below the beautiful uncertain weather. In a pastoral country of hills, such months are especially pleasant. All the small rivulets are kept perpetually alive and transparent in their grassy or pebbly beds — the flocks feeding on the braes, repose while in the fitful sunshine, just as in the warmth of summer — and frequently the whole air is filled with insects sent up from the rushes, or crevices of the rocks in their ephemeral festivals. If here and there in the clefts on the mountain tops some patches of snow are seen, they serve only to make the faded verdure of the pastures below appear brighter. The little moorland birds are heard twittering long before Valentine's day; and the flocks of fieldfares are more shy than when in severe storms they alighted among the drifts, and could with difficulty find their food on the winter fallows. Then, at the time of merry Christmas, neighbors have to

find their way to each others' houses by more circuitous paths, according to the position of the bridges; for no stream is frozen, and perhaps the low lands are flooded or full of pools, like the seashore at the flowing tide. The crowing cocks are distinctly heard in the calm from house to house to a great distance; and, from the hill side, the shepherd can count a hundred wreaths of smoke, seemingly settled, for hours together — so breathless is the atmosphere beneath the blue firmament and all its fleecy clouds.

Such had been the character of this open winter in the parish of Holylee; and not a homestead within all its bounds more enjoyed the temperate season, or looked more beautiful under its variable colorings, than Bracken Braes. Indeed, there had scarcely been a single day, since Lucy went to the Hirst, on which the family could not sit below the plane tree. Its hard healthy buds seemed impatient for the full spring; while the lilacs and horse-chestnuts, all the way down the avenue, when tinged by the sunlight, were, in the early part of February, as far forward as they had sometimes been at the middle of March. The primroses shewed themselves, as it seemed, almost before the glory of the last year's garden-flowers was forgotten; and the geraniums and myrtles were oftener left out on the sloping bank, for hours together, than they had ever been in any one's remembrance. There had even been blossoms on the fruit-trees before the earliest bird had begun to build its nest; and that earliest bird was the thrush, that again hung its cradle in the Traveller's Joy, descending like often altered drapery over the parlor window.

Michael and Agnes were without their Lucy, and yet they had never been more perfectly happy. Always on the Sabbaths she came into her father's seat in the kirk, and sometimes went with them to Bracken Braes — walking over to the Hirst before dark, or in the moonlight. The dear stranger thus continually restored her parents' hearts, and carried her real presence in upon the cherished image of her absent beauty. Every Sabbath Agnes and Isobel thought they discerned some new sweetness

in her appearance or manner; as for Michael, he desired but to hear her voice, and was satisfied. Martha, in whose disposition envy or jealousy had no place, and who now felt that she owed every day new obligations to her uncle and aunt, was at no pains to conceal her admiration of her incomparable cousin, and knew that she could not more acceptably prove her gratitude.

But in no other house, for many miles round, had there been such a change for the better, in all things, as at Ewebank. It had not pleased Providence to grant to Mary Morrison, in early widowhood, the comfort that breathes from the cradle — for her baby died almost as soon as born; but Mary considered that affliction as part of the punishment of her disobedience. Herself deceived by her unhappy husband, she had been prevailed upon by him to deceive her father; and she had lived sorely to rue that clandestine and irregular marriage. Her father was now an altered man indeed — patient, even mild — and under the power of a pious penitence. The change had not been imposed upon him from without, and therefore liable to other change and relapse; but it had been worked out by his own spirit fighting with itself — the better part finally triumphant. Pride, stubbornness, and a wilful hardihood, had been his besetting sins; but now all these were gone, and Abraham Morrison was gentle as a child to her who had for so many years trembled at his frown, and loved him with a troubled heart. Besides, Abraham felt that he could not be a long liver; and every day seemed more and more anxious to make amends to Mary for all the evils which his former neglect or cruelty, far more than her own error, had brought upon her, in those very years which nature holds privileged from any rueful distress. Sometimes when the sunshine broke suddenly in upon them sitting by the fireside, or as she was going about her work, with the constant approval of her father, Mary, in spite of her great misfortunes, felt a strong spirit of happiness expanding her bosom, and she would start to hear her own voice humming some cheerful air, which perhaps she had warbled with Lucy Forester on the Gowan Green.

It was the general opinion over all the parish that Lucy Forester had saved the life of the Lady of the Hirst. Even the proud and stately Mrs. Ramsay, who with difficulty could bring herself to see either merit, beauty, or virtue in any one of what she called plebeian birth, had been drawn against her will into an affection for her, and treated Lucy with all the kindness that her peculiar manners would permit. Emma Cranstoun had, during the whole winter, been exactly in that precarious state in which any neglect, or even injudicious care, might have proved fatal, and in which even the silence of unaccompanied solitude might have insupportably weighed down her spirits to death. But Lucy was always with her, and that was enough, whether mute or speaking; her looks, motions, and words were all timed, and measured, and toned by the nicest observations that a naturally fine mind could make under the influence of affection; and, not only no touch, but no breath even, was too rudely applied to the lady's fame, that, like the leaf of the sensitive plant, would have shrunk into a tremor at the slightest violence, during that illness in which the immortal soul may be stricken into anguish by a cloud darkening the day, or the leaves rustling against the window. From November till May, Emma Cranstoun had never left her room; but now the summer was again at hand, and in a few weeks she was to leave the Hirst, and seek new strength in the air of Italy. Mrs. Ramsay was to take her, for at least a year, to Genoa, Florence, or Pisa: the Hirst was to lose its lady; and Lucy Forester to return to Bracken Braes.

Emma Cranstoun did not despair of herself; and, although the idea of taking Lucy with her to Italy had certainly not only passed across her mind, but even taken possession of it, she knew that it would be impossible to do so without cruel injustice to her parents. Michael Forester was perfectly happy, no doubt, in his blindness, but then he could not live were Lucy away in a foreign country; while to Agnes, whose health was by no means strong, her departure would seem like death. The lady felt that Lucy had done all the duties to her that nature

and religion could approve, and was ready, with even a hopeful cheerfulness, to embark on a voyage to that beautiful land, to which so many have sailed, to drop their bodies into a foreign grave.

It was a sad day among all the hills of Holylee and Ferns, when Emma Cranstoun was to leave the Hirst. Never did June breathe a more beautiful summer than had been deepening the umbrage of these old woods, and clothing, even their shadiest recesses with a profusion of wild flowers. The year was in its perfection, yet the Hirst was in one hour to be darkened. Emma Cranstoun had many friends to bid farewell to from the houses of all the gentry, far and near, who came that day to the Hirst, not on idle ceremony, but with sincerest sorrow, took Lucy, an hour before her departure, into that green-house, now filled with odorous balm and the brightness of a thousand intermingled blossoms, and, joining in a prayer which they had often before repeated together, they there separated in silence — Emma going to join her friends in the drawing-room, and Lucy to her father and mother, who were in the great hall.

The Lady of the Hirst soon appeared gliding down the wide staircase, and walked to her carriage through the midst of the whole tenantry. There was Michael Forester, with his head uncovered, and Agnes weeping many tears; but Agnes was not the *only* one who wept, for there were orphans and widows in that crowd; and they who had no cause to shed tears, from any afflictions in their own lot, could not withhold them, when the young, the beautiful, the charitable, and the pious was seen taking her departure from the house of her forefathers to a foreign country, too probably never more to return.

CHAPTER XXXV.

IN a few weeks Lucy received a letter from Emma Cranstoun, written on the eve of embarkation, in a hopeful spirit ; and if she read it once, she did so a hundred times, in the room beside her parents, in her own small retreat beneath the plane tree, up upon the hill side, and on the Gowan Green, half way to the Hirst, whose extensive woods were visible from that eminence. The handwriting was firmer, Lucy thought, than usual, and she inspected the form of every syllable, that she might guess the degree of strength possessed by the dear hand that traced the affectionate words. 'There were no melancholy fears or forebodings expressed ; and Lucy, before even the Lady of the Hirst had perhaps left the shores of England, already anticipated her return in restored and established health. Letters too were coming occasionally from Ellesmere ; not that Ruth Colinson, or any one of the whole family at the Vicarage, were shining or frequent correspondents ; but, once in the three months or so, a Westmoreland letter did arrive ; and then the word "Kendal," imprinted with villanous post-office type, and ink more villanous still, across the superscription, always brought to Lucy's eyes a smile of cordial delight. The Colinson's never forgot Martha, but sent her all the news they could gather about the old people with whom she had lived, and all her humble acquaintances ; and the sound of the familiar names of persons and places took her back again, in short dreams, to the wooded neighborhood of Hawkshead, and its pretty lake of Esthwaite, illustrious alike for its pike, its perch, its plovers, and its poetry. For Mr. Thomson, the bard of Sauray, had sung Martha's departure to Scotland, which he described as an isle far off in the great seas, and remarkable, as it was indeed naturally to be expected, for the multitude and majesty of its Scottish pines.

Lucy and Martha were both out, at some distance from the house, when an elderly stranger, of very gentle-

many exterior, walked into the room, and courteously saluted Agnes and Michael. In a few minutes he told his name — the father of Edward Ellis. The manner of all present was in an instant changed from hospitable civility into the most respectful attention, and many were the inquiries about the health and happiness of the youth, who had so often cheered with his conversation and laughter the roof of Bracken Braes. But it was soon somewhat painfully observed, even by the blind man, that Mr. Ellis' tone was cold and constrained, and that he was far from meeting with sympathy their eager and heartfelt interrogations. "My son was at Rome when I last heard of him, and I believe he will remain in Italy at least another year, when probably he will visit Greece."

The chilling influence of Mr. Ellis' manner and discourse soon froze Michael, Agnes, and Isobel into unaccustomed silence. But the mystery of such apparently uncalled-for superciliousness was soon explained. "Mr. Forester, from anything I can hear from Mr. Kennedy, you are an upright man, and may be confided in; and, therefore, sir, I have taken the liberty of visiting you in your own house, which, perhaps, you may at present be thinking rather an intrusion; but the truth is, that — that I was some time ago made very uneasy about my son Edward — you will pardon, because you can understand a father's anxieties, Mr. Forester — about my son Edward, Mr. Forester, and your daughter — her name, I believe, is Lucy. Now that the ice is broken, Mr. Forester, I may say, that the remotest chance of my son forming such a connection, could not fail of being most distressing — most agonizing; and I trust in God that you will deal openly and honorably with me, and declare, if there be anything like an engagement — an engagement of marriage — for there is no use in reasoning the matter between those foolish children — foolish is the word I use, for, from your daughter's very tender age, I feel persuaded that there is no occasion for a term of severer reprehension."

Michael Forester was almost entirely unprepared for such a speech as this; for although assuredly, now and

then, he had thought it very likely that Edward Ellis, in the full flow of youthful enthusiasm, might admire, even love his Lucy, yet judging justly of that high-souled boy, he had never suffered the thought to give him one moment's serious uneasiness, well knowing that his daughter's innocence was as safe in her simplicity with Edward Ellis, as if she had been his sister; and that any love that might subsist between young hearts, in such very different conditions of life, would be little more than that emotion of common humanity, which, where the mutual objects are worthy, may not only harmlessly, but happily unite in friendship those whom destiny must soon not only part, but keep for ever separated, except in slight and transient intercourse on the paths of life onwards even to the very grave. But there was something not only in Mr. Ellis' words, but in the tone in which they were delivered, to which Michael Forester, poor and blind man as he was, had never been accustomed; and, raising himself up with natural dignity in his chair, he said, with a gravity almost austere — "My daughter, sir, is little more than a child — but since such a word as marriage has indeed been coupled with the innocent's name, be assured, sir, that my Lucy would not leave her blind father's side, if I only put my hand upon her head — thus — not for all the rank and riches in the land, although poverty, want, disease, and death were, in all their ghastliness, on the floor of this house."

The language of Michael, on all occasions of any seriousness or importance, was perfectly that of a man of education — in nothing vulgar, and not ineloquent in its simple and straight-forward phrase — at once clear and emphatic. Mr. Ellis, who, although a good and honorable, was, in intellect, a very ordinary man, had not been prepared for such an interview, and felt the artificial authority of his mere rank giving way beneath the ascendancy of natural endowments. The erect and commanding frame of the blind man, composedly seated in his chair, with one hand upon his staff, as if about to raise himself up into a standing posture — his strongly marked,

but far from harsh features, animated by sudden emotion, beyond the calm of that habitual thoughtfulness which the loss of sight had induced — his manifest contentment with his lot, which, so surrounded as he was, indeed scarcely seemed one of great hardship — his pride, or some state of the soul of a more sacred character, in his dutiful and devoted child — the affecting solemnity of his motions and gestures, every one of which slightly betrayed a sense of his comparative helplessness and dear dependence on those to whom heaven's light was not denied — and along with all these, a deference which he seemed not unwilling to shew towards one who, he had been informed, was greatly his superior in rank, as well as the courteous kindness which he owed to a guest below his own roof, and that guest the father of Edward Ellis — one and all of these things, separate or united, gave the stranger a sudden knowledge of something existing in lowly life, of which he had never had any suspicion, and in presence of which he felt abashed, humbled, and changed in a moment from the arrogant and dictatorial superior into an inferior called upon not to teach but to learn — not to command but to obey. Mr. Ellis, although confused and confounded, attempted to rally his spirits; and, after a few words of common-place compliment, said that his purse was at Mr. Forester's service. Michael, although a poor man, was as independent in his circumstances as any man in all Scotland; and if ever he had been at all worldly-minded, and perhaps all people of very energetic character, when toiling either in mind or body for the good of their family, are apt to become somewhat too much so, he had long ceased to err in that direction; for blindness had made him something better than a philosopher, and he had found the golden mean in moderate desires and a cheerful faith. Michael did not even condescend to notice what Mr. Ellis had now said; but he indulged an allowable pride in alluding to himself and his condition. “Do you think, Mr. Ellis, that in poor men's huts, the best natural affections do not reside in as great force and purity as in the dwelling of the rich or noble? Is not my Lucy as dear to me, and for the self-same

reasons, as your Edward is to his father, and a finer boy never stepped across a poor man's threshold! You have hopes — just hopes of your son — and may God in his goodness cause them all amply to be fulfilled. You act rightly in this matter. Your son must marry a wife in the same rank of life with himself — Lucy Forester is but the daughter of a peasant. These eyes of mine, sir, have not seen for upwards of five years; and the last time I beheld my Lucy, she was a fairy of a thing, that still slept in her mother's bosom. But although beauty be but a fading, I do not say a worthless flower, and although I have better gifts to delight me in my Lucy than any beauty that ever shone on maiden's countenance, yet they say my daughter is like the mother that bore her — and there Agnes — there my wife sits before you, and judge for yourself if I would exchange my lot with that of any other man living, blind though my eyes be as the floor beneath your feet."

In the silence that succeeded this impassioned appeal, Lucy Forester came singing into the room, with her hair sportively wreathed with a garland of wild flowers, and on seeing the stranger, stood suddenly fixed with all her glowing beauty, in one of nature's most graceful attitudes, on the floor of the lowly hut. "Lucy, this is Mr. Edward Ellis' father," said Aunt Isobel, anxious that the blush that already mantled over her brow, cheek, and eyes, might conceal her emotion. Lucy dropped a courtesy, with her heart beating like a frightened bird in its cage, and had just strength to seat herself on the stool by her father's knee.

Her father put his hand upon her head, from which she had just released the garland of flowers that fell at her feet, letting all her rich golden ringlets flow unconfined, and requested Mr. Ellis to speak, that, before a word was said to Lucy, he might judge for himself how she received the communication. But Mr. Ellis was dazzled with the beauty of the peasant's daughter, and at the same time persuaded by its uncommon sweetness that she was altogether artless and innocent, his naturally kind and considerate character recovered itself from an

unnecessary, if not an unworthy, fear, and he felt that it would be at once coarse and cruel even to allude to his son after what he had heard and now saw of all the inmates of Bracken Braes. All that he said or did was to put a letter from Edward into Lucy's hand, with a few words of kindness; and she, unable to endure the scene any longer, flew out into the open air, and almost without knowing whither her steps were carrying her, followed the stream down — down to the linn, and the Howlet's Nest, where Edward had first learned to meet her by accident two summers ago; summers, alas! how swiftly flown, and never to be equalled in beauty and in delight, long as that sun should shine in heaven.

The waterfall was cheering the solitary dell with its foaming murmurs; but Lucy saw, heard it not, or, if she did, 'twas like something sounding and gleaming in an imperfect dream. She leant, sick and blind, against the ivy tree, and at last opened the letter, in which she felt she was to read something forever fatal to her happiness. There were not many lines — and kind, perfectly kind they were — but still they were charged with meaning not to be misunderstood. Thenceforth, Edward Ellis was to be nothing to her, but a name, a thought, a shadow; and, as for herself, never more would her image come before his eyes as he roamed over foreign lands, or sailed on the bosom of the wide sea. Lucy Forester wept in grief — love — perhaps anger — shall it be said — despair? She went to the edge of the pool, and, taking from her bosom the keepsakes Edward had given her at the Hawkstane Spring, she dropped them, one by one, into the deep water — all, all but one, which would not leave her hand — the brooch which contained his dark glossy hair, with two names engraved upon it — “Edward to Lucy.” She took out the hair — and then the dearest memorial of all sunk to the bottom of the linn. Now, indeed, the dream was broken, like a foam-bell upon the flowing waters. Not till this moment had she been completely undeceived. Yet there had been no deceit — no faithlessness — no falsehood. Ignorant of themselves, their present condition, and their future lot, had Edward and

Lucy been in the joy of their mutual affection. He had first come to see the impossibility of their ever being more to one another than they had already been — and now Lucy saw the same truth with the same sad conviction. “Vain creature that I was, and void of all understanding, ever to dream, for a single time, in my sleep that Edward Ellis was, all his life long, to love Lucy Forester ! And yet often, too often, have I dreamt it ; and, lo ! he has passed away from Holylee — from Bracken Braes — from the linn and the ivy tree — like a cloud ; and I shall never see his bonny face again till my dying day !” But, as her tears flowed, her thoughts grew less and less bitter. She now began to recall all the delightful traits of his character, and to her unselfish nature that meditation brought an alleviation of grief. How courteous had he ever been in the cottage ! — how tenderly polite to her mother ! — how more than respectful to her father ! — how pleasant to Aunt Isobel ! But all at once she tore herself away from the trysting-place, and said within her heart that she would never more venture to revisit it — for all its beauty, all its blessedness was gone, just as the indescribable brightness of some too heavenly dream, that is felt at the time to be but a dream, and, long, long after, when it returns in indistinct remembrance on the soul, sheds something of its yet unextinguished light over the dim, and clouded, and imperfect happiness of this waking world !

Lucy looked at Bracken Braes ; but Edward Ellis’ father might still be sitting there — and she dared not — could not again meet his face, even in the gloaming. So she sat down among the broom, and did not go home till the plane tree was standing quite visible in the moonlight.



CHAPTER XXXVI.

LONG before Christmas, Lucy Forester was happy as a lark in heaven, that cares not for a few clouds, and often is heard singing when there is little or no sunshine. Idleness is the great bane both of virtue and happiness, but she was never idle, and putting at all times her whole heart and soul even into the most trifling occupations, there was literally no time for regret or repining at Bracken Braes. Perhaps it might have seemed to those persons who love to indulge themselves in useless sorrows, that Lucy was a girl of no steadfast affections, since she could so easily get rid of all mournful remembrances about Edward Ellis. But how could human life proceed at all, except in despondency and care, if the heart of the innocent were forever to retain its afflictions? Losses, troubles, and death invade every dwelling on earth; but there are few dwellings in which, nevertheless, there may not be contentment. Fleeting as human joys too often are, perhaps they are not more so than human griefs; and, at all events, it can never be a duty to brood over recollections that enfeeble our fortitude, even although they may relate to the best and surest sympathies of nature.

But while all was cheerfulness at Bracken Braes, there were sorrows in a worthy neighbor's house, that greatly affected Michael Forester and his whole family. Their good friends, the Maynes at Ladyside, had, for a considerable time past, suffered the very sorest distress that can enter within the doors of a house. Isaac the scholar, the youth whose surprising genius had been the glory of the parish of Holylee, had missed his way in the world — the broad and shining way of truth and righteousness — and had brought himself to the very gates of death. Michael Forester had long suspected that his conduct had not been what might have been predicted of a boy so richly endowed with the gifts of nature. Jacob Mayne far seldomer spoke of his son than he had used to do, and never

now with that pride which once kindled in his eyes at the slightest mention of his name. But truth could be concealed no longer — all Isaac's brightest prospects in life had been blasted by his own imprudence, follies, and vices, and he lay now in a hopeless condition within his father's house at Ladyside.

Who can estimate the blessings of education, when it comprehends within its range almost every dwelling in the land, and when all the most numerous families of the very poorest men, up even from the child of six years old to the grandsire of four-score, can read, and, in due measure, understand the Word of God, and the written commentaries of man? From the humblest huts in such a country come sometimes forth in power the illuminators of the race; while all the ordinary ongoings of life partake of a loftier character among those who pass unknown to the grave, along the quiet paths that all end there as well as the paths of glory. Generations do not then disappear merely like the leaves, but their's is an undying spirit that pervades future time, and invigorates the whole frame of social life, thus continually increasing in strength and beauty. But even this blessing is not without that alloy which mingles with all that is most excellent in man's estate. How many that might have been safe in their simplicity, employ knowledge to their own destruction! Feelings, in their origin pure and high often catch in their progress a taint of corruption — imagination often dazzles to betray — and genius itself, the most envied gift of Heaven, has it not too often conducted to guilt, despair, and death!

So had it been with poor Isaac Mayne. In earliest boyhood, when sitting on the brae herding the sheep, to him had whisperings come of a world of thought that lies forever unknown to the ordinary peasant. He saw a beauty in every little wild flower, in the structure of every blade of grass glowing with its dew-drops, and in the drooping branches of the birch trees, imaged peacefully in the unsullied water they overshadowed, which he bore within his spirit like an uncommunicated secret, a very burden of delight, which there was no one to share with

him in his solitude. Unassisted by advice, and led, as it were, by some sacred instinct, Isaac, before he was twelve years old, had pored over many books, in which his own keen and bright genius enabled him to interpret the character, which, as his intellect expanded, all seemed as full of hidden meanings as hieroglyphics. Then the young enthusiast left his native hut, and walked into the bewildering world of thought. But as he became familiar with all those ideal regions, he was at the same time surrounded, tried, and tempted by wants, cares, desires, hopes, and passions, that spring from flesh and blood, course along the veins, and, all unwearied with their ceaseless journeyings, come and go from the beating or the boiling heart. Isaac, as he stood on the verge of manhood, felt that there was truth in the fiction, that man has, indeed, two souls. On the wings of the one he soared into regions so pure and high, that he seemed to float above this earth and all its bewildered scenery, like an eagle aloft in the stainless ether; but on the feet of the other, made of gold and clay, he walked through haunts where danger lures on in the shape of delight, till at last sin boldly meets her guest with undisguised lineaments, and stamps upon his very conscience, as with a searing-iron, the brand by which she at once recognises and claims all those who have sold themselves for the price of her irresistible allurements.

Yet it was long — very long — after his first great lapses, before such a youth as Isaac Mayne could be degraded by the permanent dominion of vulgar vices. The fineness of his native genius saved him from many pollutions to which coarse natures are prone. But no happiness of natural constitution can guard its possessor from worse and worse evils, when the eye of conscience has been darkened or shut, and when religion has evaporated into a mere imaginative feeling, or been narrowed into a cold conviction of the understanding. Therefore Isaac became at last little better than a vulgar sensualist: the disorder in his spirit disordered his whole life; his duties were either neglected or despised; his character, month after month, received a darker die; and not only con-

scious of what he now was, but aware of what he might have been, he finally flung from him the hope and the desire of restoration, and was willing, in the dawn of his youthful prime, to shut his eyes forever on a world which had been spread in its beauty before him only, as it now seemed, that he might disfigure and profane all its most holy charms, and carry with him to the grave the miserable remembrance of talents misemployed or thrown away, and of aspirations that once owned no other source than Heaven, sunk now to the level of the lowest creatures that crawl upon the earth.

What could his ignorant father, his simple-minded mother, and his homely sisters, now know of the sufferings of Isaac Mayne? They saw him for some weeks wandering like a ghost about the doors, and then taking to his bed in silence, refusing sustenance, and sullenly shunning all concern even with his parents. His were failings they could neither understand nor assuage. Their kindnesses were directed to things that, in Isaac's eyes, were now less than nothing; for what signified to him a smooth pillow, food or medicine brought, with weeping eyes and the tenderest hand, or the silencing of the wheel, and of every, the least noise in that small house! Isaac cared not about his bed; for, spread it as his mother might, to him it was a bed of iron, and strewn with thorns; prison would to him have been more acceptable than any food; and there were sounds in his spirit that would not cease, louder and more alarming than the winter storm. Jacob knew not where to turn for comfort, seeing that his son's reason was impaired; but, next to Mr. Kennedy, he looked for relief, if relief there could be, to Michael Forester.

Michael had sometimes, in his solitary meditations, thought that perhaps some day Isaac Mayne might make Lucy his wife. Many things must escape the knowledge of the most intelligent of the blind; and, in this case, Michael had been greatly deceived in the character of him whom he continued to esteem and admire, long after almost all others had begun to regard it with more than suspicion. He was even occasionally displeased with

Lucy for her indifference or dislike to Isaac Mayne, and he hoped that as she grew up, and saw more clearly and widely into her condition, that her heart might be changed, and favourably inclined towards one of whom he entertained so high an opinion. But Lucy had noticed many things in Isaac that turned her from him with feelings stronger than she wished to indulge towards any human being; for her eye, quick in her innocence, had seen that Isaac was an undutiful son, and treated both his father and mother with disrespect. Lucy had not been mistaken in these observations, for when once the soul of a man has stooped to any single meanness, another and another will not only work in of itself, but will be dragged over his whole conduct by the very circumstances of life. Isaac had become ashamed of his poor parents; and there were situations in which it is more than probable he would have disowned them because of their homely manners and appearance. The time had been when he was proud to walk to the kirk with his hard-working father, and to stand hand in hand with him in the little friendly ring of Christians at the door, before the bell began to tinkle, or Mr. Kennedy appeared. But he had had the wretched weakness to attach a painful importance to the idle words that he had since occasionally heard in town talk about low birth, humble origin, plebeian blood, and so forth — expressions which are never heard from the lips of high-born men, but not unfamiliar to the mouths of the mean in nature or condition; and he had almost unconsciously allowed himself to form unwarranted associations of everything most worthy of being admired and imitated with a certain rank in life; so that it even pained him to think on the low and thatch-roofed cabin, as it might be called, in which he was born and bred; and it would have brought the red color into his face, to have acknowledged, in some companies, his humble but honest origin. When he thought on his mother even, and all his sisters working in the harvest field, or busy in the byre or the dairy, and then considered where he might then be sitting among ladies and gentlemen, into whose society his distinguished genius and talents had procured him a

ready admission, and who, most assuredly — at least all of them whose good opinion was worth having — did not admire him the less because they indeed knew that he was the son of a peasant, Isaac Mayne had often felt foolishly humbled in his own estimation — so nearly allied are meanness and pride! What high satisfaction was thus lost to this youth's soul! For, to have striven as he had done, was indeed glorious; and his imagination, under the impulse and guidance of nobler principles and feelings, might have visited in its dreams the braes of Holylee, as the only paradise on earth, and his father's lowly mansion at Ladyside as the very centre of that paradise, from which would have streamed a light that need never to have been darkened before the eyes of filial reverence.

Both Agnes and Lucy had once been witness to a scene in the churchyard of Holylee, at the close of Divine service, after which neither of them had been able to regard Isaac Mayne with their former affection. Several ladies and gentlemen, who had been sitting in the seat of the Lady of the Hirst, in the little gallery, addressed Isaac on the dismissal of the congregation, when he was along with his parents and sisters. They had known him in Edinburgh, as a young man of genius, and were not aware that Holylee was his native parish. Isaac had then, under manifest uneasiness, separated himself from the decent home group, of whom no man need have been ashamed; and to an inquiry from one of the party, who were his friends he had just left, his answer was vague, and implying that his father, mother, and sisters might be to him almost strangers. Lucy could not help eyeing him with anger and disdain, while she thought, for a moment, of Edward Ellis; and then, going up to her blind father, walked with him through the crowd, in a pride known to herself alone, but in a beauty that attracted the gaze of all the strangers, who at once said to Emma Cranstoun, — “There is no need to tell her name — your description, partial as it was, did not exceed the truth — she is indeed the Primrose of Bracken Braes.”

But all such remembrances were now dismissed from

their minds; and Agnes and Lucy, no less than Michael, thought only on the fair side of Isaac's character. They went almost every forenoon to Ladyside; and Isaac, who, day after day, had become more indifferent to everything about him, and almost wholly unobservant, asked if he could see Lucy Forester. His mother took Lucy to his bedside; and Isaac's eyes, for a few moments, recovered their fine intelligent expression, as they were lifted up towards her pale and weeping countenance. "God bless Lucy Forester!" said the dying youth; and his mother afterwards often assured Agnes that these were his last words; yet Isaac lived on for two or three weeks without pain, but insensible to the world. The old shepherd dog, that had been fourteen years in the family, leapt up on his bed; but Isaac felt no disturbance. Had the flail been sounding in the near barn, it would have been unheard. "My poor son, Mr. Forester," said Jacob, in a calm voice, "has, for nearly a week, been past hearing our evening psalm." — "I am happy to know that you are so resigned, Jacob — your wife and daughters, too, are, I think, composed." — "Ay, ay, — we have, in a manner, taken farewell of Isaac — for you see his mind is gone; but his soul has not yet been called away, and I will not give him the last kiss till he is dead." There was no one else in the room at this time but the two fathers; and Jacob Mayne, whose usual state of mind towards Michael Forester was that of reverence, now embraced him in a sudden burst of agony, and cried, with a loud voice — "Pity me, pray for me — for Isaac — my darling Isaac — the life, and the light, and the pride of this house — will never know his father's voice more!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LADYSIDE was, at all times, rather a melancholy looking place, standing as it did, at the very remotest end of the

valley of the Heriot Water — there an insignificant rivulet, and at a considerable distance from any other habitation. The high heather hills overshadowed it; but there were no trees — for the decayed and mossy stumps of a decayed forest could not be called trees; and Jacob Mayne had never been very well able, with his narrow means, even if he had thought of it, to make any plantations, either for ornament or shelter to his cattle. Its mournful character was deepened on the day of Isaac's funeral, which was on one of those dim and silent forenoons that, in early spring, breathe a pensiveness over the air and the earth. No bleat of lambs was yet heard over the braes — the birds had not begun their carols — and the perfect silence was broken only by the sound of feet, as friend and neighbor, one after the other, at short intervals, were coming in to the funeral.

The company assembled in the kitchen — a wide, low-roofed room, with an ample chimney — in the corner of which, below the smoke-stained beam, Isaac Mayne had sat during many a long winter evening, conning over his book, to the delight of his proud father's heart, undisturbed in his studies by the noise of work or merriment. Mrs. Mayne had, herself, with the assistance of Agnes, arranged all the seats that very morning; and everything was decent and orderly about the room. Many an intelligent and thoughtful countenance — not a few of them with their foreheads sprinkled with gray hairs — were seen in that circle. Some wine and funeral bread was handed round, and partaken of by all, after prayer from Mr. Kennedy; and then, going into the open air, the company formed themselves behind the coffin, which had been placed on the green before the door, and the procession moved down the valley.

Isaac's mother and sisters had, during the prayer, taken farewell, on the green, of his mortal part, standing together with Agnes and Lucy; and as soon as the party left the door, weeping eyes followed it from the window in the thatch, down the stream, till, round a small mount, it disappeared.

The funeral company was a large one — for the Maynes were respected in the parish; and, as for Isaac, his fame had spread far beyond its narrow bounds; and now that he had expiated, even by death, whatever faults he had committed, the grief that went with him to the grave was profound and universal. Many people who could not be invited to the funeral, nevertheless came into the churchyard, and all clothed in mourning. The children of the village school were drawn up in a line near the grave, and the low walls that enclosed that quiet place of burial, were almost entirely covered with spectators — few of them indifferent to the solemn scene. Michael Forester, who, next to the father of the deceased, was chief mourner, stood close beside him when the coffin was lowered down, and grasped Jacob's hand when the first shovelful of earth said, without man's words, "dust to dust."

The silent party dissolved; and, in an hour or two, most of them who had composed it went to their work in the fields. Michael went back with Jacob Mayne to Ladyside; and, early in the afternoon, the whole family sat down to their meal. There were not a great many tears, and such as fell at times were not very bitter; for every heart had had time to prepare itself for weeks before Isaac's death; and now that his remains were given up to invisible decay, a calm came down from heaven upon the house — and life, although it had lost much, still had to them its blessings.

"Mr. Forester," said Jacob, "many great kindnesses have we received at your hands; but this last is the greatest of them all — religion itself has been a mair unspeakable comfort to us all on this occasion, because of your Christian charity to the afflicted; and poor Isaac's mother there, last night, when sairly distressed, and calling on God to comfort her, mentioned your name, and your wife's and daughter's, in her prayers. She is, as you know, a woman of few words; but there naewhere lives ane wi' a mair grateful heart." Jacob then turned his eyes toward a little bookcase that hung on the wall by a string fastened to a nail, and said — "'That was the wark o' Isaac's ain hands, before he was ten years old. Many

and many an hour have I seen him at it ; and an ingenious thing it is for so young a creature. These volumes were the first he ever bought — wi' his ain money, too ; for we were very poor in those days, as ye ken, and Isaac was most industrious." But here Jacob's voice was mute, and he walked out into the open air. Michael joined him there ; and, by the long conversation that ensued concerning Isaac, the father's heart was quieted, and believed that his son's spirit was now happy in heaven.

Leaving the family at Ladyside composed and resigned, Michael, Agnes, and Lucy, returned beneath the stars to Bracken Braes. Lucy scarcely opened her lips ; for she thought of Isaac's very last words, and knew, now that his heart was still in the dust, how much dearer she had been to it than she had ever believed. His many good qualities well deserved her tears, and the remembrance of the happy hours she had long ago passed with him and his sisters, when every one loved and admired him ; but the thought that she had been dearer to him than even his own nearest kin, and that his affection for her was the last thing to leave his soul on the bed of death, touched her with an almost self-upbraiding sorrow, and gave his memory a hold on her secret bosom, from which she felt nothing could ever displace it.

While they were all sitting round the fire, and just as the clock, striking ten, told them to retire to rest, the door opened, and in came Mary Morrison. "Pity me !" cried Aunt Isobel ; "what brings you here sae late at night ; tell us — are you all well at Ewebank ?" Mary sat down on the seat that Lucy's ready hand had placed for her, and said, calmly — "My dear father is dead ! — perhaps I should not have left him ; but there was nobody in the house with me ; and, when it became quite dark — for the fire had gone out — I was not able to abide the dreadful stillness, and have come here." The key of the hut was yet in her hand, which she had carried in it, unconsciously, all the way from Ewebank.

Abraham Morrison's death had been sudden ; but every circumstance attending his latter days had been such as

now to comfort his daughter. The reconciliation had been perfect; and the last year of the old man's life, blameless and Christian-like, had prepared him for this change. Mary had been already acquainted with grief, and now sat in her cloak, beneath which she still wore her widow's weeds, unagitated by any strong emotion, like one having come from a neighbor's house on some grave but not grievous errand. She had come, too, at a time when all her friends were, from the melancholy duty in which they had been engaged during the day, in a state of mind altogether congenial with her own; and in another hour Mary was lying, as she had often done before, in Lucy's bosom.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WHAT strong support does the consciousness of a good reputation yield to all men in the discharge of their most arduous duties, and how benignly does a regard to the opinions of those among whom we live blend almost into one motive with that which we observe towards the injunctions of our Maker! Michael Forester knew that he was esteemed — beloved by every family in Holylee; and, although he had in no one single instance ever tried to become the object of such sentiments, by any unworthy submission or compromise, yet he rejoiced to know their existence, and felt them to be, in part, both the impulse and reward of virtue. Above all, his character as a peace-maker was especially dear to his heart and conscience; and nothing cheered his blindness more than the humble trust, that, in administering comfort to human misery, which it had not unfrequently fallen to his lot to do, he had been obeying the precept of Him whose prime commandment was — that we should love one another. Michael had often thought that, had he still possessed his eyesight, he might have been more selfish, more exclu-

sively devoted to the temporal interest of his own family, and more lukewarm in the interest of his Heavenly Master. He attributed no merit to himself in any kind action which he had been enabled to perform; but his conscience rewarded him by the most delightful of all feelings — gratitude to God.

There were now two orphans living under his roof — his own brother Abel's Martha, and Mary Morrison. Never were any two creatures more different; yet they were equally grateful, and, in a month or two after Abraham Morrison's death, it might almost have been said equally happy. Martha had never known much deep heart-grief, but then she had endured toil, trouble, hardship, and neglect, during the worst years of her life; and during the best, her happiness had sprung up of itself, whatever it might have been, against not a few depressing circumstances, of which the misery had been felt, although overcome. Since she came to Bracken Braes, no one could be more content and cheerful, shewing her enjoyment of life, not by any starts of delight or sallies of glee, but by a perpetual vivacity that kept her stirring from morning to night in solitary occupations, which, whether easy or laborious, seemed alike sources of the liveliest satisfaction. Martha was now quite a Scotch girl — an epithet which she had borne in Ellesmere, without any very good title to what was so respectable; yet still something of the Westmoreland dialect blended with the Doric of the Selkirk braes, and, at times, recalled pleasant remembrances of the distant Vicarage. The first time that Michael stood beside his brother Abel's grave, with Martha by his side, who read the letters on the stone rather with a grave curiosity than any mournful emotion — for what more could they well be to her but mere chiselled characters — his heart travelled back to the garden at Dovenest, and into another world of pleasant years, that seemed almost as much apart from that in which he now lived, as two separate states of existence! He thought too of his father's love for Abel, and his conscience told him that he had not forgotten the old man's dying words.

Such remembrances might not now, after so many years, be very frequent; but they never recurred without refreshing his whole moral being, and deepening his contentment, his gratitude, and his faith.

Towards Mary Morrison, the feelings of the whole family, if not of a more affectionate, were of a deeper kind. But for them she might have been wholly lost; and the gradual revival of her disconsolate, and once almost broken heart, was a daily delight to them all; but far beyond others, to Lucy. There was nothing approaching to jealousy in Martha's mind towards Mary; on the contrary, that warm-hearted girl always behaved to her with a thoughtful tenderness, which made Lucy love her cousin more than she had ever done before, and anxious to shew her, at all times, that there was no preference of Mary Morrison in anything that could wound either pride or affection. Martha was certainly inferior to them both in fineness, and tenderness, and depth of character; but still they had no feelings in which she could not, in her own way and measure, sympathize; and she sometimes won upon their very closest affection, by unexpected and casual glimpses of sensibilities that her ordinary deportment did not display, but which yet slumbered in her nature, and were fated, at no very distant time, to be called into play in the more difficult duties of mature life.

As for the Maynes, it is wonderful how happy they all were at Ladyside. Jacob's eldest daughter had been requested in marriage by one of the most respectable young men in the whole parish, the only son of a considerable heritor; and this event, independent of its natural interest to a father's heart, relieved his too anxious and foreboding mind from all the worst fears about his family in case of his own death.

Isaac had cost his father much money — such now were Jacob's own words when speaking of his dead son, to his very intimate friends, and without the remotest meaning of censure — so that it was generally supposed that there was a heavy mortgage on the property formerly belonging to Richard Mayne. Such thoughts, very

natural, and not at all reprehensible, came to Jacob's mind, along with the influence of time, and the operation of many other better reflections, till, by midsummer, a stranger going in to Ladyside, might have remained there a whole day without seeing or hearing anything to make him suspect that, a few months ago, death had taken away him who had been the pride of the whole house.

It was again midsummer, and no less than two whole years had revolved since Lucy had set out at midnight, under the guidance of Edward Ellis, for Ellesmere. These two years had brought her to woman's estate; and now, in her seventeenth June, perhaps her friends at the Vicarage, were they to see her now, would scarcely know her to be the same maiden that came so suddenly upon them, on that day of rain and thunder, weeping and sobbing on account of her dying mother. These friends had not forgotten her, and the hour had come when Ruth Colinson and her brother Miles were indeed at Bracken Braes.

Beautifully prepared for their arrival was the avenue, the green, the garden, and the cottage. Agnes and Lucy remembered the exquisite neatness of everything in and about the English Vicarage, and almost despaired of equalling what seemed to be peculiar to the character of that country. There was a richness, too, of verdure and bloom at Ellesmere, with which nothing in their own poor pastoral part of Scotland could pretend to vie; and coming from all those woods and groves, sounding with their open or hidden waterfalls, what could the Colinsons think of their lone valley, and the Heriot Water wimpling along the open pastures? But these thoughts had been only half sincere; and as the sun rose on one of the fairest mornings that the summer had brought, Lucy eyed the place with pride, and was glad that their friends from England were to arrive at Bracken Braes during such heavenly weather. In the cool of the evening before, all the shrubberies had been watered; a slight sprinkling of bright blue gravel, from the burn, had given a spirit of liveliness to the avenue and all the plants through which it winded along; and it seemed as if every

bee in the parish were in the plane tree, so loud, and yet so lulling was the sound in that umbrageous tent.

Ruth and her brother had been true to the very hour ; and never had there been a happier meeting than now befell in front of that cottage. Martha was no insignificant personage on this occasion ; and, for a short time, Lucy left all the questions to her, preserving all her own kindest whisperings to Ruth, for the shadows of the evening.

This visit awoke in the hearts of Michael and Agnes the most distressing, and the most delightful remembrances belonging to their whole life ; and, while Lucy accompanied Ruth and Miles all about the braes, and, not unfrequently, to the Hirst — the only old place worth seeing to strangers — they remained at home conversing about the Vicarage, and the mercy shewn to them by their Maker in that crisis. But, after the first week, Michael also took his staff, and made one of the party on many of their excursions ; and, on all such walks, Lucy more and more regarded Miles Colinson with esteem and affection, for then he shewed himself forth in converse with her father ; and his were talents strong by nature, and nobly endowed by sciences in which there is no deception, and that give a simple and unostentatious character to the whole mind of him by whom they are successfully pursued. How superior seemed to Lucy the calm settled knowledge of such a mind as that of Miles Colinson, to the wild and disturbed eccentricities which, with all his feeling and genius, had fatally characterized that of Isaac Mayne ! This knowledge was clearly in alliance with virtue. Here, heart and mind were almost different words for the same thing ; and Lucy, when Miles was speaking to her father on such subjects as she could understand, did not so much think about his abilities as his dispositions ; for a certain considerate sweetness of sentiment embued all he said with the common spirit of humanity. Yet was Miles Colinson fit to be compared, in her imagination, with Edward Ellis, the graceful, and elegant, and beautiful boy, that had once laid himself down, and watched over her, while she slept

by that mossy well in the desert, with no other living thing near them but the moorland birds, and the bees murmuring through her dreams among the flowers and heather-bells of the solitary mountains? But that was a childish vision, and never again could it find an abiding place within a bosom not yet indeed depressed, but still somewhat hushed by the almost unconscious influence of the shadows of time stealing upon her altered being! The past, while it rose up before her, now always possessed the character of a dream, and, like a dream, stood apart by itself from the realities of the living world. Such dreams visit every human heart — sometimes, perhaps, sickening it by the contrast, yet oftener inspiring gratitude; for, in all their beauty, what are they but the golden mist that shrouds all objects in undistinguishable delight, and veils from youthful eyes the real shapes and lineaments of nature.

Besides, Lucy's whole mind was now woman grown; and all the relations of life had been, oftener than she knew, meditated upon by her with their delights and duties. The conversations that took place every evening by the fireside, when all were sitting together, were often of a light, but never of a trifling nature. Pure were all Lucy's thoughts as the well in which she dipped her pitcher, but they were familiar with all sacred household words; and, as she beheld herself in her mirror which, close to the window of her bedroom, reflected, not only her face and figure, but all the flowering richness of the avenue, and the beauty of the broomy braes, she would sometimes slowly retire, and then as slowly return in her rejoicing beauty, like a bride on her wedding morn; and, it may be, wondering, in a transient thought, if it were impossible that she could be now beloved by Miles Colinson, as she had once been by one far away over the roaring seas!

Poor Mary Morrison, the blossoms of whose early affections had been so soon dismally blighted, thought now of nothing else than Lucy and Mr. Colinson. Could she see Lucy married to such a man, then would all her own cares be forgotten. The sight of such pure, calm, thought-

ful, and profound affection as was dawning upon her eyes sometimes almost made her weep; for although her conscience had not much to reproach her with in her unhappy love for Mark Thornhill, how different had been his wooing from this! How uncertain and how troubled, — how cruel in its close — and then what distraction on that bed of death! Their's were the first gentle beginnings of mutual faith — of love almost before the hearts in which they were arising, knew with what kind of delight it was that they were so sweetly stirred. There were truth, simplicity, honor, and religion, all united in one holy purpose, and yet that purpose scarcely known to those bosoms of which, nevertheless, it shaped and colored all the very lightest and the very gravest thoughts. "In former days, sometimes when sitting by ourselves on the sunny braes, I have said to Lucy that I would be her bridesmaid — some far happier creature than me must now stand in that place; but perhaps I may be allowed to go with Lucy Colinson to Ellesmere; and methinks these hands o' mine could better than any ither, but her ain, put up her bonny nair, and adorn her like a lily on her wedding day. No black must be worn on that holy morning of sadness and joy; and I will lay aside my weeds for one day, returning to them again by the next sun, for they are tokens of my affection for him who is gone, and also of my sin and repentance."

But what did Miles Colinson think of Lucy Forester? He could not forget the hour when first he saw Ruth wringing out the rain from her ringlets, as she stood among them in the Vicarage, beseeching them to say if her mother was indeed alive. But now those ringlets, although they had lost something of that sunny glow which the tempest could not tame with all its deluge, were far more lovely than ever, in the subdued and tender light that shone over her thoughtful forehead. Then she had been accustomed to gaze on everything she beheld, with the almost instinctive delight of childhood; but now Lucy understood more of the meanings on the face of nature, and looked over the heaven and the earth with a spirit of piety that felt God to be there, even while all

her thoughts were about her fellow-creatures and their habitations. Even when Lucy spoke of that festival on Windermere, which, at the time, had seemed to be more like a glorious train of sights passing in the trance of a fairy dream, than a scene transacting on the bosom and the banks of a real lake, it was with a calm and almost melancholy voice; for was she ever again to behold those clouds, and woods, and waterfalls, shadowed far down within the depths of that mirror, over whose surface not an air breathed to veil with dim suffusion the reflected scenery of earth and heaven? "Am I ever again to be at Ellesmere," thought Lucy; and the same thought, more eager, ardent, impassioned, and overwhelming, was in the heart of him to whom Lucy was every hour becoming dearer and more dear till even the very sense of her surpassing beauty was lost in a love that lived upon her whole delightful character, and could never die while life lasted, even if that beauty were to be utterly extinguished; for still the maiden at his side would be Lucy Forester, and none but she was ever to be cherished in his heart, whether it had been already doomed that she was thenceforth to be to him but a shadow, or a steady light that might shine on him forever!

It was not possible that Miles Colinson's growing attachment to Lucy could escape the notice of any one of those most interested in her welfare; and Michael and Agnes, happy as they would both be beyond their imagination of happiness were their daughter to become the wife of such a man, almost wished that he were gone from Bracken Braes. They did not know whether such a connection — and yet, perhaps, the very forethought was altogether but an idle dream — might be agreeable to the worthy vicar. The visit had merely been one of a friendly return; and such consequences as now seemed far from improbable, could never have entered into the minds of Mr. Colinson's parents when he and Ruth left Ellesmere. There almost seemed, to the high and independent mind of Michael Forester, something clandestine, or at least not perfectly open, in thus allowing the affection of the guest below his roof to grow into a deeply rooted attach-

ment for his own daughter, without being perfectly certain that such an attachment would be approved by those who were not indeed privileged to dispose of their son's feelings, but certainly to guide them, and to be consulted in their final decision. Agnes felt the same difficulty and delicacy in this situation; but Aunt Isobel considered the subject in a very different light. "What 's the use, children, o' making yourselves unhappy about what is one day to be the greatest blessing that ever shone upon us frae heaven, either at Dovenest or Bracken Braes? My troth, there is nae occasion to pity the folk at the Vicarage. A grand vicar apostolic o' the Episcopalian Church, the young man's father maun indeed be, if Lucy Forester be not worthy of marrying into his family! For my ain part, I like the lad, God forgie me, very near as well as Mr. Ellis himself—and he was a boy o' many thousand; but will anybody tell me that he deserves our Lucy? And yet he loves her well—that I can see, dim and auld as are my een noo—and will love her better and better as lang as he lives; for he has a strong thoughtfu' heart, that young Mr. Colinson, and gin I am no sair mistaen, a clear conscience; and when such a one loveth a maiden, it is not for her face, or her een, or her breast, although that maiden be our bonny Lucy hersel', but for something that endureth and fadeth not away, the soul within us being immortal."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THIRTY long days, certainly in general the finest of all the year in Scotland, from the middle of June to the middle of July, had floated away down the sky since Ruth and Miles Colinson had first found themselves domesticated at Bracken Braes. Scarcely during all that time had there been a dim forenoon, or any other than golden sunsets. Such weather may be objected to on account of

sameness, and deficiency in picturesque and poetical effects; but it gives ample scope of time to hill-wanderers, and their walks of discovery between morn and eve, unimpeded by swollen rivulet or dripping fern, can embrace vale after vale — glen after glen — secret chasm known but to natives — wide moors not without a spirit of lonesome beauty — lochs miles asunder — and the cataraact far up among the mountains — the boundary, indeed, of the journey, and beneath whose overshadowing birches, within reach of the dewy spray, the pilgrims may find shelter from the mid-day heat, and spread their table in the peaceful wilderness.

But the last evening they were to pass at Bracken Braes, was now about to descend; and, although there was no reason for melancholy, a pleasant pensiveness seemed deepening below the shadow of the plane tree. Ruth and Myles had taken farewell of the few families in whose houses they had familiarly sat, especially those at Raeshaw, Ladyside, and the Manse; so there was nothing more to do in the view of their departure. Lucy, Ruth, Mary Morrison, and Martha, walked down the Heriot Water in that uncertain and unconcerned state of mind as to their movements, that every one feels when affected by mingled pleasure and pain. Miles Colinson was glad to see the group tripping across the bridge of the Whinholms; for he was desirous of being alone for an hour with Michael and Agnes, nor did he care if Aunt Isobel were also to hear his confessions.

There was but little chance of any visitor coming to Bracken Braes at that hour of the evening; but Miles Colinson thought neither the parlor nor the plane sufficiently safe from interruption, so he requested his friends to walk with him a little way up the hill behind the house, in among the hazles, hollies, and yews, where there were several little glades, as perfectly retired, within a hundred yards of the porch, as if they had been in the heart of a forest. In one of these they took their seats on the limb of an old disinterred tree; and, while one and all suspected what might be the nature of the communication, yet

not one of them would have been surprised had Miles Colinson introduced quite another subject.

Miles at once declared, with earnestness but composure — for he felt too profoundly to be visibly agitated — that he loved Lucy, and hoped that, if he were so happy as to gain her affections, her parents would give their consent to the marriage. He acknowledged that as yet he had no reason to believe that her regard for him was at all of the nature of love, and that, indeed, the idea of her extreme youth had often so influenced his behaviour towards her, that he was aware she could now only think of him as an elder brother. He felt that he owed it to Lucy's simplicity and innocence, to the parental kindness with which he had been received at Bracken Braes, and to the character and condition of Mr. Forester — for now, for the first time in his life, he alluded to Michael's blindness — to the remembrance of all that happened when they were at the Vicarage, and to his own father and mother, to confess in this manner the state of his affections, before he even endeavored to win Lucy's heart. "I dare not now speak to your daughter of love or marriage, Mr. Forester; for were Lucy to hear me with averted eyes, methinks I could not bear to live; but all I beseech of you is leave to hope, that if, in future months or years Lucy should give me her affections, you will not dislike me for a son-in-law."

Both Michael and Agnes, when Miles Colinson had ceased speaking, thought of themselves, and that sweet spring Sabbath, more than seventeen years ago, when, in the gardens of Dovenest, they found that a few words had betrothed them, and that a new light, fairer than ever they had beheld before, was stealing over the woods of Dryden. Agnes was now sitting by Michael's side, and laid her hand in sudden happiness upon his, which was not slow to return its pressure. "If I live," said Michael, "to see the day on which you will call Lucy your wife, this world will be almost too happy for her blind father!" The fine and delicate spirit of Agnes had felt unspeakable delight in the reverence with which Mr. Colinson had behaved to her husband, and the exquisite tenderness he

had shewn towards Lucy's youth and innocence. This was indeed love — love such as she had herself enjoyed for so many years — uninterrupted — unimpaired — indestructible in its sanctity and in the preserving spirit of human joy, that, but for love would fall — die — and be buried like the flowers of the senseless earth.

Isobel alone stood up, and, her eyes shining with a lustre like that of youth, looked towards the setting sun. "I see long years of happiness preparing for them by that hand, which is over all His works. Yes, I have seen my Agnes the happiest of the happy — as she is, and ever was, the best of the good; and now, lo! her Maker hath also blessed my Lucy, and her life and her latter end shall be peace."

But now, voices were heard below, and Lucy's was among them; and, from the deadened sound, it was plain the party had sat down beneath the plane tree. Although but few words had been uttered by those assembled in that glade, yet a weight of solemn and sacred meaning had lain upon their language. Miles Colinson, without any pain, was willing to obey the injunctions of Lucy's parents, not to address her till the following summer, having been assured by them that there was no danger of her heart yielding to any other attachment. From their affectionate prayers for his welfare, he felt that, in his absence, they would not only prevent his image from fading altogether away from Lucy's heart, but would hold it always before her in the most favorable and endearing light. In that hopeful state of mind, he began to dwell upon little circumstances that had occurred between him and Lucy, that seemed now, although they were too indefinite even to be named, to be not wholly insignificant; and, indeed, had he not been, although aware of his own moral worth and intellectual acquirements, a more than usually modest person respecting any power over the female heart — a power which he had never before thought of very seriously exerting — he might have believed, without any very great mistake, that Lucy's eyes regarded him with a pleasure that, although not what could be called love, was something, at her tender age, far better

— from which would, in due time, be made to spring “that consummate flower,” which can only unfold to perfect beauty in the light of matured reason.

Certainly that evening, although the last, was the happiest that Miles Colinson had passed at Bracken Braes. Lucy, altogether unconscious of being not only the object of all his love, but, as it might be said, affianced to him by parents who feared not but that her affections would soon glide into his bosom, sat with her arm round Ruth’s neck, and gave her, over and over again, the kindest messages to her father and mother, independently of a long letter, which she had written something in the form of a journal. Miles had made many pencil sketches of the scenery of Holylee, which Lucy had never before thought so beautiful in reality, much as she loved it all, and he asked her to keep them for his sake. Lucy promised to do so without a blush, but with the most benign eyes; and, with Miles leaning over her, arranged, according to her own liking, the small green nooks with a few sheep, or two or three cattle feeding, or standing below a rock — a little broomy oasis in the blackness of a Scottish moor — a waterfall — ay, even the linn of the Howlet’s Nest closed in by gentle braes, in its sylvan loneliness, from all but the silent sky — a glade in the Hirst woods, selected by Lucy herself, because one of the favorite haunts of Emma Cranstoun. These, and many more, she promised, as she was asked, to keep for his sake; nor did she conceal her joy at the thought of visiting Ellesmere, which Michael said was not impossible next summer, unless, indeed, the vicar and Mrs. Colinson would come to them at Bracken Braes. “The Lady of the Hirst,” said Lucy, “will be coming home next summer; for, by the blessing of God, her health is now perfectly restored by the air of those sweet foreign lands — and I must not be away when she returns.” But Miles Colinson, from her affectionate looks when she was thus thinking of Ellesmere, drew the most delightful hopes, and said, with a smile, “that, for the future, they would all trust in Providence.” Lucy had shewn some of Emma Cranstoun’s letters, first to Ruth and then to her bro-

ther, for they contained no secrets that might not be heard by any friend she had; and Miles Colinson could not but be still prouder of his Lucy — for to himself he had sometimes dared to call her so, when the sunshine danced into his heart — on thinking how highly that accomplished lady estimated her character, and how tenderly she admitted her into her friendship.

Early next morning a parting took place, without a tear, beneath the plane tree; and, as long as Ruth and her brother were visible, many a farewell was wafted to them down the vale, by hand and kerchief — many a prayer sent after them, when they had disappeared.



CHAPTER XL.

THE harvest in the parish of Holylee was this season a late one, and there had been much cold and inclement weather during the ripening month, so that well on in October, the crops, especially on the uplands, were still green, and promised badly for the thrashing floor. Since the time Michael Forester came to Bracken Braes, there had been much more land brought into tillage, along the course of the Heriot Water; and, except now and then, in a late and unfavorable season like this, the new agriculture had been far from unproductive. It so happened that there were a greater number of acres under the plough this year than any previous one, and there was even a want of hands for the harvest. What happens in one hill parish, generally happens in a great measure in another, and bands of shearers were now traversing the south of Scotland, some of them even from the most distant Highlands.

A small band, consisting of father, son, and daughter, had looked in at Bracken Braes, and were hired for a

fortnight. At the expiration of that time, they were to go to Ladyside; and it was probable they might get a few days likewise at Raeshaw. They had not been at Bracken Braes half a week, till Donald Fraser had told the story of his not uneventful life.

Donald had been a soldier, and had seen service on the sands of Egypt, under Abercromby. Although not the Highlander who took the invincible standard, he would not have been slow in taking it had it come in his way — and a bayonet in his hand must have been an unchancy weapon. Unfortunately, his broad breast and brawny limbs had escaped without a wound, so Donald had no pension. Foreign warfare and foreign climate had done his constitution some wrong, and, to say the truth, except by fits and starts, it did not appear that Donald had ever been very fond of work. On leaving the army, which he had been forced to do by rheumatism, that at one time threatened to leave him lame for life, he took up his abode in a hut near the head of the Dee — the most mountainous region perhaps in Scotland. He had left a wife and two children there when he joined the Forty-Second; and soon after his return, his wife died, leaving him to provide, as best he could in that solitary region, for Hamish and Flora. Year after year had passed away, and there had never been any absolute want of food or raiment, such as they were, in Donald's hut. The lochs were full of trout, the river of salmon, the heather mountains of grouse, and the forest of deer, and Donald had several fishing-rods, and one rifle. Now that his son and daughter were grown up, they had for several harvests sallied into the Lowlands, sometimes walking and working their way by Montrose and Kirkaldy, and, on the last occasion, coming direct from Aberdeen to Edinburgh, by the Brilliant steam yacht.

Hamish was about nineteen years of age, of quiet manners, and inoffensive disposition, as most Highlanders are, when not put out of their way; but bold, active, and patient of hunger, cold, and toil. Besides his father, who was almost of gigantic mould, Hamish seemed little more than a dwarf; but he was, in fact, rather above the mid-

dle size, slim, straight, and muscular — every motion betokening the possession of strength and agility not thrown away on useless pastimes, but reserved for occasions of real need. The courtesy for which his poorest and most uneducated countrymen are so pleasingly distinguished, marked his demeanor in a more than ordinary degree; and, when he threw aside his bonnet, his freckled and weather-beaten countenance, without being remarkable for one single feature — except, perhaps, its light-blue and sincere eyes — was extremely agreeable; and, when lighted up with a smile, even handsome below its curls of yellow hair. There was not a better hook on the corn rig than the young Highlander; for, besides going over much ground in little time, he left the stubble no higher than his ancle. As for food, he cared not about it, nor what it was, if wholesome — barley meal and goat's milk had still been the chief fare in the hut by the Linn of Dee; although, it must be confessed, that a more potent liquor, when it came in the way, was in no disrepute, and that the old man especially, although he knew his besetting sin, was not very cautious against temptation.

Flora Fraser was one of those perfectly simple and harmless, say at once innocent, creatures, of whom it is thought we may read in old songs and ballads — the fictions of imaginative minds in lowly life, but nowhere existing, even in the hut farthest remote from the haunts of men. But in those little traditionary strains of feeling and of genius, the human spirit speaks of itself no more than the truth; and although to those who live not among the lonely dwellers in the wild, and know them most imperfectly from the mere appearances of their outward condition, such pictures may seem false and visionary, yet the colors are true as those of twilight or the sunset heavens, and, touched, by an unerring hand, obeying the genuine impulses of nature. Flora had slept all her life on heather or straw, and little or no care had ever been taken to keep her mind from the knowledge of those evils, and vices, and sins, that, like the seeds of plants, seemed to be wafted by the winds into the most secluded and solitary places, and sometimes grow there with a rank

luxuriance, even below the same atmosphere that cherishes all the best charities of life. Although her father protected his daughter's virtue, and would have killed the man who offered to corrupt it, yet the rough old soldier had, of course, little delicacy of thinking or of speaking, and had not only witnessed, but taken a part in many a scene of turbulent and reckless enjoyment in those bloody but triumphant companies. But still, like some beautiful small bird of the mountains, that rises up, with unstained and shining plumage, from the dankest marsh, and in the midst of the raining mists, young Flora Fraser had retained all the hues of her native innocence, and returned home from her walks or occupations among the mountains, happy as that bird to its nest. And now, cheerful in the haughs or on the uplands of Holylee, as in the glens that open down to her own river, she sung her old Gaelic songs around Bracken Braes, or sat, sheltered in her Tartan plaid, when the sleet came strong, below the hills that wanted the heather, on which, from infancy, she had watched her few sheep and goats, at the foot of the great Highland mountains.

Martha, who, for the last years of her childhood, had always been a worker in the open air, was not contented to remain at home in domestic occupations, and now joined the shearers. She and Hamish Fraser were together on the same corn rig; and, busy as they all were, still there was time for talk even during their work; and then, at meals taken in the field by the hedge side, on some bank below a tree, all was glee and merriment with every group. Hamish and Martha were at first fellow-shearers, then acquaintances, and then friends; and, before the fortnight was over, and all the fields covered with stooks, or some of them left naked by the wains rapidly moving to and fro from the stack-yard, they were more to each other than friends, even lovers in all the warmth and tenderness of youthful affection. The Frasers always, after the day's work, walked down to the village to their beds, in a small apartment there; and it did not require much persuasion to induce Martha occasionally to accompany them; while old Donald led the way with

his bagpipe, that sounded with a wild outlandish music among the braes — laments and marches, melancholy or exulting, as over chiefs that had fallen, or with kilted battalions rushing to battle. Love was made both in shade and sunshine, without those young creatures knowing that it was love; and, on the evening before the Highland party were to move to Ladyside, Martha promised to marry Hamish Fraser, and to go with him, if he chose, to the world's end.

Donald blamed in no measured terms his son's folly, and tried to frighten the young lovers by terrific pictures of the married life; but he had himself done the same thing in his youth; and when he saw that a marriage it would be, he gave Martha his blessing. Flora, too, cheerfully called her sister, for Martha was too passionately attached to Hamish not to give her affections freely to one so near akin to him. Lucy Forester was not held the less dear; nor did she become forgetful or ungrateful to her uncle and aunt; yet still from Bracken Braes she was willing to go, and fearlessly, and without an hour's hesitation, to enter into the uncertain prospects of a new life.

Not a little surprise was given to them all, at Michael's fireside, by this unexpected event; but what had happened was not to be changed. There was something to regret, but not to blame; and, since Martha would go, it was now their duty to be as kind to her, on her departure, as they had been during her stay, and, in as far as lay in their power, to contribute to the comfort and respectability of her condition. Nature, where there is no guilt, may as well be allowed to take its course, even when prudence would say nay. Perhaps there was some wilfulness in Martha's disposition which could only fruitlessly have been opposed, and, if thwarted, would have affected not only her future happiness, but her very nature; and, judging considerably and affectionately what was, on the whole, best for her condition and circumstances, Michael and Agnes used few arguments to dissuade her from her resolves; and then made a promise, which they faithfully kept, to treat her the same as ever while she

stayed at Bracken Braes, and to send her, not only with their best prayer and advice, but with substantial comforts, into the wide world.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE three merry harvest-homes at Raeshaw, Ladyside, and Bracken Braes, were not over till the first week in December. Many of the latest wagons left the marks of their wheels on the snow; and some patches of grain, that never ripened at all, fed the working horses in the field or stable. The large kitchens of these houses exhibited, each on its own night, a feast that was not long of melting away before many well-earned appetites. There was no distinction of rank between master and servant, heritor or hind, at these plenteous boards; nor was there any need of crabbed censor to restrain the harmless wit that ever and anon set the table in a titter or a roar. Soon as the few toasts had been given, at the head of which, even before his well-beloved Majesty, Great George the King, came not with loud cheers, but low murmuring congratulations, "The Lady of the Hirst," tables, chairs, and forms were expeditiously removed, and the floor cleared for the dance, reel or jig — for waltz or cotillon were yet unknown; while Bauldy Baird, successor to Blind Sandy Paisley, now under the moults, screwed his strings to the sticking-place, and, after a few prelusive flourishes, broke, with all his birr, into the Cameronian Rant, or Lord Macdonald's Reel. Martha and the young Highlander were conspicuous for the right good will with which they tripped it and flung it to the gay strathspeys. Lucy did not decline the awkward bow and the bony hand of the homeliest suitor; and even Mary Morrison herself was once or twice on the floor, although she preferred sitting with Agnes or Isobel, or making herself

useful among the refreshments. Old Donald had still in the room his unmerciful bagpipe, and among the "sma' hours," without asking leave of any one, blew up his chanter; and, to the angry dismay of Bauldy Baird, whose fiddle was then no more heard than if it had been a mouse "cheepin i' the riggin," filled the house with a din that made many a pretty girl put her hands to her ears, and no doubt sorely disturbed the bonny gray cock, and his wives and family, in his adjoining roost beyond the hallan.

Now that all these festivities were over, and winter had fairly set in, who, to make amends for his absence the year before, brought with him his most boisterous train of storms and snows, the Highlanders spoke of taking their departure—not for their hut at the Linn of Dee, for that they had left forever and a day, but for distant Canada. Donald Fraser had for many years been impatient of his poor and uncertain, and often inactive life, and had resolved to emigrate. He knew that he had a brother in Canada, although he had not for a long time heard directly from himself, and that he was also in a prosperous condition; many of his countrymen, and not a few of his clan, were settled there; and the old soldier, who had been in all climates, cared not if he should leave his bones in a foreign soil, since it was tilled by Highland hands. Hamish and Flora were willing to go with their father; and they were buoyed up by the adventurous spirit of youth, that looked with an imaginative eye into a life beyond the seas. It was not to be thought that Martha would be the one of the party most prone to regret or fear; she had been contented in Ellesmere, happy at Bracken Braes, and she now hoped to be even more than happy in the Canadian woods.

Michael Forester could not, however, agree to their plan of embarking at Greenock in a vessel just then about to sail, and insisted on their waiting till the winter hurricanes were over, and taking advantage of the more moderate breezes of early spring. With some difficulty the stubborn veteran was prevailed on to remain in the neighborhood for a few months; and Ewebank, which, since

Abraham Morrison's death, had been untenanted, was soon put into a habitable state. Donald and his son took immediate possession. Michael sent over one of his best milch cows, and an old oak chest, by way of girnel, well filled in its two departments with oat and barley meal; Isobel added a few of her celebrated mutton hams; and old Donald himself, who, if there was a still within six miles, scented it out with miraculous sagacity, procured, by some inexplicable means, a tolerable sized cask of mountain dew, in which he endeavored to assure his sceptical friend, Mr. Forester, that there was not a single headach.

Both the veteran and his son got plenty of winter work to do, and earned good wages. Martha was still an inmate of Bracken Braes, but there were few days on which she did not see her lover. It was fixed that the wedding was to take place on her birth-day, in the middle of February, when she would have completed her seventeenth year; and they were to take their passage in the first Greenock ship that was to sail for Canada in March.

Meanwhile every hand was busy within Bracken Braes, getting ready clothes and comforts of all kinds for the voyage, and their Canadian dwelling. Martha had never seemed to care much about dress before, although her Westmoreland education had taught her at all times to be neat and tidy about the house, as a swallow; but now she half imitated the way in which Lucy put up her hair, and half adorned her ringlets, by more careful and assiduous touches of her own taste. In compliment to Hamish, or rather, in undesigned sympathy, she sent all the way to Edinburgh for a plaid of the Fraser tartan; and whether it was that her features and complexion suited the colors of the web, or that her face was now tinged and animated by the glow of youthful passion, Martha certainly never had looked half so well before, and might even be said to have some pretensions to beauty. But Martha had no pretensions to anything she did not possess; and any little alteration that now took place, either in her appearance, her manners, or her general conduct, proceeded entirely from that blameless joy that rose within

her heart at the thought or the sight of Hamish Fraser ; and that, so far from engrossing her wholly, prompted her to even more than her usual obligingness and gratitude to everybody around her, from all her relations at Bracken Braes, to Alexander Ainslie at Holylee, who had driven them, years ago down from Ellesmere. Seeing her cheerfulness, her industry, her activity, her intelligence, and her amiable disposition, now shewn in a stronger and more trying light than ever, the whole family felt that they were going to lose a most excellent member, but at the same time one who was admirably adapted for the life she had chosen, and who would be happy, and make any kind husband happy, in any corner of the world.

The middle of February was not long of arriving ; and the young Highlander issued out from the Manse, after Mr. Kennedy had made them one, with Martha on his arm, amidst a loud shout of congratulation, sent up from all the village school children, and others of a larger growth. Alexander Ainslie, whom nature had destined for one of the Tenth Hussars, took the lead, and kept it in the broose, on an iron gray galloway, whose fame is yet rife in the parish of Holylee. Donald led the foot procession across the hills, with cheeks before which the peony would have waxed pale, the drones of his pipe flowing with a hundred ribbons ; and the day being calm, it is asserted that the concluding pibroch was heard in the kirkyard, all the way from Ewebank, although that solitary farm-house was three good Scottish miles from Holylee ; and the length of any one of these may be judged of by all who have performed the distance at the close of a day's walk, when the wayside inn has seemed to retire into the mists, and the termination of a Scottish mile to be extended to a remoteness fearful to the very imagination.

About a fortnight after the wedding, a letter came from Donald's agent, a tide-waiter in Greenock, marked, "Haste and care" — an injunction to which, no doubt, all due attention was paid by more than one postmaster —

urging him to appear forthwith on the quay, for that the good ship *Montreal* was nearly ready for sea.

Before the marriage, Michael Forester had given Martha fifty pounds in money, and paid all their passages to Quebec; stores had been also purchased for them in Greenock; and Martha's wardrobe was little inferior in the number of articles, and far superior in solid worth, to many a young lady sailing in the Orient for a husband. Donald, Hamish, and Flora, had each a privy purse — what sums they held did not appear, but they could not have been very magnificent, saved as they had been from the wages of their Lowland harvests. A certain sum was to be sent to them annually, after it was known where they had ultimately settled, so that the emigrants were to be independent of Donald's brother, who might be dead, or, if alive, unwilling to acknowledge the claims of kindred. There was, in good truth, nothing to send them away to Canada, but the hearts of one and all yearned for a foreign land; their cool determination had become longing desire; and even Martha was impatient to hear the rustling of the great ship's sails — so different from those that she had seen gliding along the blue water of Windermere — and that were to waft her away from the hollow skies, which lately had seemed to her to encircle the whole world.

The emigrants came to take farewell, most probably forever, of their friends at Bracken Bracs. Martha sat by the side of her youthful husband, and was waited upon by Lucy, who, with tears in her eyes, handed round wine and cake on the little silver tray she had got in a present from Emma Cranstoun. Mary Morrison could not help looking at the young bride almost with pity, for her sake, and with a mournful remembrance of her own sad story; but Aunt Isobel would not allow even a parting scene to be clouded with vain grief. "God bless you baith, my gude bairns — nae fear you will be happy. Hear how the very bird, in his cage there, sings to you — the first time he has tuned his pipes this spring — and isna it a cheerfu' sang! A' the world over, nae better omens are desired than the lilt o' birds; and, in Scotland, the maist

encouraging is that o' the lintwhite and the mavis." Agnes put a small Bible into Martha's hand, and asked back her own as a memorial; Michael put his hand on her head, and, remembering his brother Abel, gave her a silent blessing; and then sweet Flora Fraser came in for her share of the tender farewell, when the emigrants at last rose to go. Lucy and Mary Morrison were not in the room; but they had gone to wait for them a little way down the burn, and they did not return home till more than an hour after their final departure.



CHAPTER XLII.

ONCE more had the sunny June loaded the woods of the Hirst with beauty, and darkened into grateful twilight a thousand glades, that, but a month ago, were all open to the sky. The gray walls of the ancient edifice could now be espied but from a few distant points; for oak, elm, and sycamore were hiding all its turrets. For two dull years, the majestic and venerable place had lost the animating and presiding spirit, that breathed a cheerfulness throughout all its scenery. Although skilful hands had continued to do everything required by the perfect order and regularity of the walks, lawns, and gardens, that furnished a delightful contrast to the rich confusion of nature over the adjacent groves and remoter woods, yet, during the absence of the lady, many fine and delicate perceptions had been wanting, which had formerly discovered, almost every day, some new embellishment, or some magic change — perhaps no more than the lopping off a bough, or the thinning of a coppice-screen, that, in a moment, brought the airy distance to view, or a cottage embowered in trees, or a bright slope of hill side, or a wider expanse of sky, for the clouds to travel in or to repose. But now the Hirst was to be jocund as in its

best days; for the wide gates of the avenue were flung open, and, under an arch — a triumphal arch of flowers and blossoms — was the lady expected to pass to her native home, returning from blessed Italy in perfect health, and, as the rumor flew, if possible more beautiful than ever.

A few days before, there had been a meeting of some of the most intelligent of the tenantry, and they had arranged with the land steward their plan of welcome. Ten thousand branches would never be missed in those extensive and gigantic woods; the removal of ten thousand flowery sprays would scarcely dim the lustre of that wilderness of lilacs and laburnums; the bees would know no difference among the banks of wallflowers, although troops of children were to carry away, in little baskets on their heads, all that their hands in one forenoon could gather of those balmy treasures of our Scottish Flora; and if the earliest roses must go, although yet but in the bud, let them be plucked without a sigh, and trust to the prodigal summer to bring undiminished brightness to every parterre and terrace. But they all knew that the lady had been fond of roaming among the braes, and that she admired nothing more than the spreading fern, and the broom that yellowed the little lonely glens. Many a pretty plant, and flower, and weed, grows almost in every solitary nook, and places familiar only to the birds, bees, and sheep, were now rifled of their sweetness, that the triumphal arch might shew to her gaze some of the native products of the hills, intermingling their simple charms with the richness of the lawn and garden. It was not till a little after sunrise, on the very morning the lady was expected to arrive, that the last touches were given to the arch by Lucy's own hands, and so many perfectly fresh and unfading flowers were clustering there, that the wandering bees wheeled from their forward flight to the clover lee, and lingered in the honey dew of those gorgeous garlands.

Such was the spirit of the festival; for, among those lowly folks, love looked to imagination to brighten the lady's birthplace to her eyes on her return from a

foreign land. That triumphal arch was nothing less than most beautiful, with its shower of blossoms now moving in the breeze, and now, when the air was calm, depending steadfastly as images in water. But the bugle rang from the top of the central turret of the hall — a signal of the happy approach — and up came a splendid equipage sweeping along, while the tall white ostrich feathers, gracefully nodding in the airy sunshine, told all the joyful assemblage that the Lady of the Hirst was there. There was no shout, nor yet was there any music to sound a welcome; but all the tenantry stood with uncovered and bowed heads in salutation; not with downcast looks, as on the day she left them, but with smiles of rejoicing, and not a few tears, amidst a deepening murmur of blessings. On both sides of the entrance, immediately below the arch that shed flowers down upon their bosoms, stood a row of pretty children, all dressed in white, who dropped courtesies, with eyes fixed in admiration of their lady's angelic beauty, as she stood up in the carriage, and, perhaps little able to speak, waved blessings over all the crowd, with arms that, in their graceful motion, were fairer than the snow. A little apart from the main assemblage, in hopes of attracting the lady's eyes, stood the party from Bracken Braes; and Lucy's heart quaked with joy when that hand waved a kiss towards her, and a smile followed it, of such piercing sweetness as placed her at once in heaven.

This was no idle pageant, that passes away, and leaves the heart half despising the emptiness of a fantastic dream. But here gratitude gave visible and vivid expression to itself, for its own and its object's delight, in the greenness of bough, and the brightness of blossom, which might, without any regret, all fade and wither in the next week's sun, since the feeling they symbolled was imperishable. The very children felt the whole meaning of the spectacle, of which themselves made a proud part; and the wonderful show of flowers was understood by them, as it indeed was, to be an offering to Heaven — although they had never heard of such altars

-- of thanksgiving for that beautiful being's escape from the grave. The Sabbath before Mr. Kennedy had alluded to her in his prayer; and that recollection now gave within every innocent heart over which it came a religious sanctity to the rural festival.

Nor was the assemblage suffered to depart and dissolve, till the Lady of the Hirst had an opportunity of more fully expressing her sense of the kindness shewn, than she had been able to do in the sudden surprise of that delightful reception. A message was sent to Mr. Forester, who was present, in perfect happiness, amidst the beauty of a scene which, from Lucy's words, he had been at no loss to imagine, that she would be happy to see all her friends, young and old, on the southern lawn. There they were soon arranged in an order that could not be otherwise than proper, since all fell into the places that were felt to belong to their own age, character, or condition. The door of the greenhouse opened, and down came the lady, with light steps, and across the carpet sod, close to the first row of her humble friends. With the sweetest smiles that ever were seen, she, first of all, said, that she hoped happiness had been in their homes; and then, with a more solemn expression of eyes, returned thanks to God in their presence for his great mercy to herself. "But where is Lucy Forester?" These few words, said with a silvery tone, brought Lucy from her father's side; and as she stood there, with eyes downcast, and cheeks pale in emotion, many thought that it was hard to tell which was the most beautiful -- Emma Cranstoun or Lucy Forester. All, too, remembered that she had attended the lady in her illness, and had been instrumental in saving her very life. Was it not also well known that Lucy had been the friend of all, whenever she had been questioned about their firesides; and that, from her representation, their benefactress had learned all her true knowledge of the family at Bracken Braes. Therefore, not one heart there felt the slightest touch of envy on seeing Lucy thus singled out; while Michael, who had heard the words with sightless eyes towards heaven, was perhaps the happiest

man there ; and the gentle Agnes cared not if the whole assembly noticed her gushing tears. Emma Cranstoun kissed Lucy's cheek, and whispered a few words into her ear ; and then, knowing her own station, and finally understanding how far the lady's condescension was, at this time, meant to extend, Michael's daughter, after a low obeisance, returned to his side, and the whole group expressed their pleasure and applause.

This had not been intended for one of those more ordinary commonplace merry meetings, where tables are placed beneath the shade, and the jovial tenantry of some great estate feast in honor of the house. Such festivals have their own peculiar character of happiness, and may they never be blotted out from the holidays. But here the meaning of the entire day was higher and more solemn : little parties were formed by the children and their parents, up and down the woods, at some considerable distance from the hall, which was now left altogether undisturbed ; other groups took their frugal refreshments by the spring wells among the braes, plucking the water cresses to their bread ; and, in not a few of the houses on the estate, there were evening meetings of youths and maidens, who were all dressed already in their best array, and saw each other home, among the falling dews, and below the moon and stars.



CHAPTER XLIII.

Lucy had never, in former years, contemplated the beauty of Emma Cranstoun without melancholy ; but now there was no occasion for any such feeling ; for her step, although light as ever, was now far more elastic. Nothing like lassitude or decay belonged to her most graceful of all figures. Her voice was mellow as her own new-strung lute ; and the joyfulness of grateful health tinged

her face, without being able to overcome its characteristic pensiveness. She never could — never ought — never wished to forget, that from the very brink of death she had been restored; and that remembrance, present with her in her pleasanter hours, could not but give to her eyes a perpetual expression of piety, that threw an affecting light over all her ordinary pursuits. It might well have been said that her manners were religious, for they were all inspired by a spirit that was so indeed; and while Emma Cranstoun seldom or never introduced, into her common conversation, any of that language which, being divine, ought cautiously to be guarded against any involuntary profanation, her pious heart spoke in the entire structure of her speech. She said, that she liked even to hear Lucy's Doric tongue; but what could be her pleasure, in all its simple or Scottish phrases, sweetly syllabled as they were, to the delight which Lucy enjoyed from that perfectly beautiful English that flowed from the lady's lips, expressive at once of all the highest endowments of mind and soul, and of a range both of thought and feeling to which the humble shepherdess of Bracken Braes feared even to raise her imagination.

Lucy felt now, even more than ever, the vast distance at which she stood from the Lady of the Hirst. But her's was still the same affection, not at all altered in its nature, only deepened and strengthened by a clearer insight into the order of things. When a child — at least a mere girl — she had often sat in the lady's presence, never, never indeed, with anything like the feeling of an equal, but almost without any restraint, and free of her own accord to talk or to smile. But now Lucy saw the nice duties of look and manner which that gracious and benign friendship imposed — duties that no one else could have discerned. There is nothing to hinder love from existing between persons in most unequal conditions, when each knows well the full nature of her own; and perhaps in some peculiarly felicitous instances, that very inequality preserves the completeness of the emotion, and continues it to the end pure, unfading, and entire. It was so with Emma Cranstoun and Lucy Forester. Here it might be

said met together the genii of the hall and the hut — and who could pronounce which spirit was most beautiful, the lady with her dark hair braided across her pensive forehead, and a few pearls among the lace veil that shaped her head-dress into that which charms in old pictures of our Mary Queen, or the shepherdess with her golden tresses yet as rich in ringlets as when Isaac Mayne compared it to a star twinkling on the brow of the hill, with rays seemingly half light and half dew, so bright, and yet so soft, the splendor?

“What a heart must be her’s,” thought Lucy, “never to have forgotten one single event or incident, however small, that we ever talked about — never to have lost the least part of her interest in any of the concerns of any one poor family in the whole parish, after an absence of two years — and these years, too, past in struggling with disease in far away countries! What a memory have the truly good!” All this was true, and no exaggeration of Lucy’s admiring heart. Indeed, the Lady of the Hirst was more attached to it than ever; and now that her health allowed her to rise with the sun, what blessings was it in her power to bestow during the length of a midsummer day! At Bracken Braes all that was needed was her presence. “An hour in the week, on an average, all the year through, will content me,” said the blind man; “a visit from her makes that day a Sabbath, Agnes — does it not?” And Agnes felt the very same state of mind her husband had thus expressed. Aunt Isobel, it seems, had once seen the lady’s mother on the steps of Dalkeith House when she was a bride; but she was forced to confess that the living Emma Cranstoun was the fairer — one of the few instances on record of a daughter being more beautiful than her mother. Mary Morrison, now almost cheerful in her widowhood, yet meek as when that word was in childhood first applied by general consent to her name, desired no better happiness than to behold Lucy sitting in the lady’s smiles; but if not a better, yet a more animating happiness was her’s, when she herself too came in for her own share of kindness, retired as she most frequently was on some seat in a nook, or a little

out of the circle, not to shun observation, for she had lived once more to love the sunshine, but from an humble habit learned in other days, and proceeding from a part of her very nature.

"Lucy, have you heard that my brother is coming to the Hirst? I fear that his long detention in France has not been for the benefit of his character; but I shall hope the best. You know that I had not seen Harry since I was almost a child; but last winter he came to see me at Rome. He is, alas! too much a foreigner — but he treated me with the greatest affection. I do not think that he will ever live at the Hirst; and he has told me that I may live here, if I choose, all my life." No words could be more happy to Lucy, for her heart did not expect, and scarcely wished ever to care much for anything out of the parish of Holylee.

But Emma Cranstoun had another communication to confide to Lucy, and she was now led to do so from its connection with what she had said about her brother. "I am engaged, Lucy, to be married; but he who hopes to be my husband loves dearly the parish of Holylee, and we shall reside at the Hirst, if my brother prefers living abroad — if he possesses the hall of his forefathers, which I wish he may do, then Mr. Ellis intends to purchase the Mains, and build a mansion there, on the site of the present ruin."

"Mr. Ellis!" that word almost stopped the beatings of Lucy's heart, although at first it made it flutter nearly into a fainting fit; but Emma Cranstoun was herself too much possessed by her own thoughts to observe her emotion. "Edward told me that he had frequently visited the family at Bracken Braes; and, indeed, when I think of your moonlight journey, I could almost be jealous;" and Emma lifted her beautiful white arm to adjust a ringlet that she then felt upon her blushing cheek, with a smile that shewed at once ignorance of poor Lucy's first love, and confidence in the power of her beauty. "I am sure, Lucy, you will admire my Edward; he, I know, will love every one I love; and there is not, and never will be, that friend dearer to my heart than Lucy Forester."

Lucy soon recovered her composure — and, indeed, what had there been said to agitate her — for had not Edward Ellis been long ago thought of with unpainful affection, and, of late, often removed out of her remembrance! And, then, had not her own heart found more pleasure, more happiness, more delight, than perhaps she might be willing to confess, even to herself, in the company of Miles Colinson? Could she have laid her hand on that fair bosom, and denied that it had ever heaved a tender sigh when dreaming of Ellesmere? Was a dream of the days of old, once bright and beautiful as it was — and tender, most tender, in all its celestial bliss — to come back from the mist to drive away the pleasant prospects which were dawning around her life, or to deaden her spirit to the enjoyment of more sober realities? Lucy had too simple, too strong, too wise a heart, long to indulge in such delusions; and, after a pause of not very many minutes, she kissed the lady's hand — an expression of attachment which she especially loved, because, felt to be at once respectful and endearing — and, after prayers for her happiness with Mr. Ellis, as sincere as ever went to heaven, she returned perfectly happy, by the Gow-an Green and the Hawk Stane Spring, to Bracken Braes.



CHAPTER XLIV.

WHEN Michael Forester compared all the circumstances of his life, from his earliest remembrances, with all that he knew of the lot of any other individual, high or low, rich or poor — and such comparisons had, of late years, been more and more frequently made by him in his solitary meditations, or in cheerful conversation with his beloved Agnes, when all the household were asleep — what reason had he to be grateful to Providence for so

many undeserved blessings! Even their unceasing solicitude about Lucy had been to them both a source of happiness; for, in all their anxieties, they felt that she was nevertheless secure, and that their fears proceeded entirely from an excess of parental affection. Her beauty and her goodness were to them one idea; and, when praying together, they felt assured that both were indestructible. Then, how had all their worldly affairs prospered! Rich they were not, nor wished to be; bad seasons and fluctuating prices had affected them as well as their neighbors; and, for a good many years, they had had struggles to preserve their independence. But the farm of Bracken Braes had seemed to become more productive after Michael's blindness, not merely from its increased cultivation, but even as if the sunshine and the dews had visited it more genially since that affliction. All the money that Michael had at first to borrow had been repaid; Aunt Isobel's three hundred pounds had again been put into the bank in her own name — for, old as she was, it was yet possible that she might survive them all; the stock on the farm was his own, and the furniture in the house; and he had considerable sums lent on unexceptionable securities. Were Lucy ever to be left an orphan, she would be very far from destitute; and, perhaps, that confidence is the most perfectly soothing and satisfactory feeling that can fill the bosoms of affectionate and thoughtful parents. What more could they desire on this side the grave?

Now that Lucy was grown to woman's estate, they sometimes had spoken to her of such matters; and, although at first she listened with a painful feeling — for the very possibility which these conversations implied of her parents' death was most distressing — yet, since they were so deeply interested in what they said, she did not interrupt them, and even put on an appearance of being interested herself, which was altogether foreign to her real state of mind. As long as her father and her mother lived, Lucy cared not either about riches or poverty; were they to die, she felt that nothing could ever lighten to her eyes the darkened earth. But they were both well,

strong, and happy; neither were they old; and, as for her mother, Lucy thought her, nor was she greatly deceived, except the Lady of the Hirst, the most beautiful person she had ever seen; but Emma Cranstoun was not yet twenty, and Agnes Hay nearly twice that age. Her matronly loveliness was yet admired by all; but they who remembered her when she first came into the parish of Holylee, doubted if, at that time, she could not have stood a comparison even with the lady, now in the perfection of her virgin beauty.

They were all sitting together under the plane tree, and Lucy cheering the evening silence with a song, when a stranger, who had stood unobserved at a small distance during the time she was singing, advanced courteously, and introduced himself as Mr. Maxwell. The name was one that had long since ceased to be familiar to Michael's mind; but Agnes at once recognised a likeness in his features to those of the gentleman whom she had seen at Dovenest, that evening her husband told her of the ruin of his fortunes. "I am the only son, Mr. Forester, of Mr. Maxwell who came into possession of your property between Lasswade and Roslin." These words awoke many remembrances in Michael's mind, but they were of no painful nature, for he had never repined from the first day he had left Dovenest, and had long been so perfectly reconciled to his lot, that he often felt the pleasure of living over again his life in those quiet gardens washed by the Esk that murmured louder than the Heriot Water in his dreams. "It is getting late in the evening, sir; will you be our guest till the morning?" Mr. Maxwell assented, and they all went together into the house.

It was not till after supper and prayers that their guest spoke of any but ordinary subjects; but just as Lucy was lighting his taper, he asked leave to address them on an affair of some importance, and which he hoped would tend in some measure even to promote their domestic happiness, although he saw, and indeed previously knew, that it was built on a surer foundation than mere temporal prosperity. "My father, Mr. Forester, was an honest

and upright man, and I should be unworthy of calling myself his son, did I not respect his memory. But by his successful industry I am now a rich man, and I am come to restore to you the full value of that property which, on an unfortunate occasion, passed from your into his hands. I do not say that I am unentitled to it, although my doubts are strong; but be that as it may, it is now yours; and had the place itself not long ago been purchased and repurchased, as you know, Dovenest itself should now have been put into your possession. Before I leave this roof, my words shall be made good."

Michael Forester continued to sit exactly in the same posture in which he was before Mr. Maxwell began to speak, nor did any visible emotion pass over his placid countenance. Agnes looked at her husband, but her face was equally calm. Aunt Isobel alone spoke:—"Ay—there is an honest man—something more than honest—your very face, my friend, declares your character, and my heart warmed towards you when you knelt beside me on our earthen floor. Your substance will not be lessened by this act; but for it and others like it—for good deeds, like bad, never go single—Providence will bless your children's children." Mr. Maxwell seemed to feel that his conduct scarcely deserved such benediction; but as his conscience told him that he was doing right, his heart did not wholly decline the old lady's commendations, and he had seldom been happier than he now was at that fireside.

Michael, in a few minutes, shewed that very strong feelings were rising within his breast. The mere recovery of what had been lost so long ago did not affect him at all, but the principle of Mr. Maxwell's conduct did so exceedingly, and there also came over him a deep sense of the goodness of his Maker. How had all things wrought together for the good of himself and family! His father had died quite happy at last, and full of years—poor Abel, after much suffering, no doubt, which his errors incurred, had found, when all his wanderings were over, a hopeful death-bed, and a quiet grave—Martha the orphan, although far away, had prospects of happiness in

that peaceful foreign land — who was so good, and so happy, as his beautiful Lucy — Agnes Hay had brought blessings into his house which none enjoyed more than that gentle spirit — in extreme age, Aunt Isobel was cheerful as a new-stirred fire — and Mary Morrison, in her meekness, was like a child of their own at Bracken Braes.

For an hour after all the others had retired to rest, Michael sat by himself in his chair, aware, from the cessation of the flickering sound, that the fire was dead on the hearth. It was pleasant to be alone in the perfect silence. His whole soul was calm and bright as the heavens stretched with their stars over all the quiet hills.

What stronger proof of the superior excellence and happiness of virtue, than that placid and serene contentment that is almost always the portion of the blind! That inner world, which is to us all the most essential world which we inhabit, is to them more clearly discovered than to ourselves. Our inward eye is dazzled with the light in which we live; but theirs, in its darkness, sees well and undisturbedly. Their mind is a clearer world to them, as it is also more clearly revealed. Hence it is, that judging more justly of the human soul, they are less troubled with its passions. Cut off from so many of the amusements and pursuits of human life, and left so much to the dominion of their own silent spirits, they feel and know that there is no stability — no hope — no trust in vicious appetences or degrading thoughts. All these they fear and abhor as false friends, stealing upon the noiseless calm of their lives, and whose visit must bring and leave behind trouble and remorse. But kind affections — pure sentiments — lofty thoughts — gentle opinions of humanity — and devout feelings towards God; these are a solace and support, in which there can be nothing vain or delusive. Resignation is ever attended with its own perfect peace; and the blind, sitting in their solitude, and for a while forgotten, perhaps even by those who most tenderly love them, are happy, because their souls are true to virtue, and because the Great Being

who inflicted the dispensation, has more than compensated it, by that inward light which shines amidst the thickest darkness, with its own sacred and inextinguishable lustre.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE Hirst had, for several weeks, been a scene of unusual festivities; for Henry Cranstoun, with several fashionable friends, had arrived there from London; and it soon appeared that his tastes and enjoyments were altogether of a different description from those of his incomparable sister. Mr. Cranstoun had not been in Scotland since his childhood; for he had received his education at a great English school, and one of the English universities, and had afterwards been detained for many of the best and most critical years of his life at Verdun. That system of education, which has formed so many good and great men, had to him been productive of nothing but evil. His fine talents had either lain wilfully neglected, or grossly misapplied — his passions had run riot in early indulgence — and, before he left England, he had formed wild, irregular, and disorderly habits, which his long residence in France had confirmed. It was not possible now, either to himself or others, to understand what was his natural character, it was so overlaid with foreign accomplishments, follies, and vices. His, however, had seemed to be the very worst kind of selfishness — that which enjoys nothing intensely, unless there be about it something vicious or unlawful; and with all that cheerful laughter and airy demeanor, that to heedless observation betokened only good humor and generosity, Henry Cranstoun had always an eye to his own gratifications, and would greedily grasp them to the sacrifice of every just and humane principle. But then he was in the prime of life — extremely handsome — skilled in almost every art

of insinuation and allurements — master of all the modern languages of Europe — a consummate musician, for music was an art he might be said to have inherited — of an old family — and with a princely fortune.

It is surprising what a quick and true perception of the moral character of their superiors is often possessed by people in the lowliest conditions. They may make great mistakes as to manners, acquirements, and intellectual capacity; but, with regard to the essentials of worth, their opinions are generally right. Virtue breathes without disguise — speaks openly — and appears forth clearly before men, even in the most retiring of unostentatious characters. Its lustre cannot be hidden. If it shine not like a star, it will glimmer like a lighted window. Intellect often works in a sphere of which common men know nothing, not even its existence; and the famous genius may seem to them a recluse, ignorant of the world, and all its concerns. But if there be great vices in a man's character, let his rank or riches be what they may, they will be reprobated by the honest poor in their huts. Outward respect may still be shewn — for that is due to their station; and the peasant, shepherd, or hind, may, without reproach of conscience, unbosom to his worthless landlord. But all his most courteous smiles, and words, and acts, within the doors of their huts, or the gates of his own halls, will never purchase for such a man the smallest portion of genuine esteem. His entrance into humble households will be regarded with suspicion; and fathers and mothers will pray that their porch may be unvisited by him, who knows not the value, and feels not the sanctity, of innocence.

Henry Cranstoun had not been many weeks at the Hirst, till he had become the object of such disturbed and disapproving feelings and judgments, very widely over the whole parish. He seemed either totally ignorant of the character of the peasantry on his estate, or insensible to its excellence. It was not a little rudeness, folly, error, or even apparent vice itself, that could have wholly alienated from the heir of an old house the affections of an

intelligent and virtuous tenantry; but this infatuated young man seemed to have even a pleasure in insulting their holiest habits and deepest natural emotions. The Sabbaths at the Hirst were now disturbed with the noise of revelry, that had been heard by whole families walking through the woods to the house of God; and, to the horror of the yet simple dwellers in the parish of Holylee, cards, and dice, and other hideous gambling, were, according to rumor, rife there, even on the Lord's day. Servants, with more even than their master's reckless vices, and a pride almost equal to the debasement of their ignorance, and the shocking brutality of their manners, swarmed about the old venerable Hirst; and some part of the indignation and scorn, which the behavior of these tyrannical slaves, at the houses of poor men, had far and near excited, could not but fall upon him, who could not only endure their presence, but whose life seemed even to depend for many of its enjoyments on their base servilities and unprincipled cruelty. "There is nothing Scottish about him or his," was the bitter expression of many a father and mother's heart. "God grant the time be not far when he and his outlandish counts and valets disappear from Holylee!"

Emma Cranstoun conducted herself towards her brother in the way that might have been expected from so nearly perfect a character. She soon saw, with the deepest grief, that she must not hope to work any great change upon him, in less time than years upon years; for his bad principles were rooted in a strong understanding, and his evil practice had made his heart callous. She endeavored to make him comprehend the character of the people, by opening up to him some of their home habits; and she did not even scruple to beseech him to respect their prejudices; for, had she called their reverence of all religious institutions by its true and high name, she would only have been more strongly exciting his ridicule or contempt. With bitterest tears of shame and grief, she beseeched him to remember that their innocence was the sole portion of the females of the poor man's family. "O brother! as you respect the purity of me, your sister,

and would, I verily believe, rather see me dead than dishonored, respect, for my sake, the purity of the harmless creatures, whose forefathers have even lived for generations on this estate. They have a hereditary claim to your protection; and, methinks, that were any infamy to come to them from yourself, or those whom you have chosen to be your friends, that I could not bear to look at these pictures of our blameless ancestors. See what venerable sweetness is on the face of Alice the Lovely, whose burial was a hundred years ago! But look — look here, my dear brother, this is the picture of our own sainted mother!" And Emma drew aside a black silk curtain, that shaded from the light a face drawn in crayons, which beamed with a mingled dignity and gentleness, not easily to be gazed on, now that their mother was in her tomb, without an emotion that, in its mournfulness, was akin to virtue.

To all these gentle and affectionate remonstrances of Emma Cranstoun, her brother was not altogether insensible; and however unapparent their influence had yet been on the general tenor of his conduct, they had at least awakened in his heart both a finer and a stronger feeling of affection for his mild and persuasive instructress. Perhaps he had hitherto loved his sister more on account of the pride he felt in her great beauty and accomplishments, which had burst suddenly upon him the first time he had seen her since a child that summer in Rome, than for the sake of her better worth; but now he felt the holy charm of virtue when seen shining forth in one by nature necessarily so dear to him; and, in the midst of his own reckless profligacy, he paid it an unaccepted and unavailing homage. Emma endured the disturbed and disreputable life he had introduced into that once peaceful hall, as long as she could do so with any propriety; but her sense of duty and dignity at length overcame every other consideration, and she formed the resolution of leaving the Hirst for a season, and going with Mrs. Ramsay to the seat of one of her father's oldest friends, who would probably understand the reason of her offered visit.

The character of young Cranstoun was nowhere better understood than at Bracken Braes ; and Michael, Agnes, and Isobel, had, one and all of them, cautioned Lucy to avoid at all times the slightest approach on his part to her company, at least when alone, either at the Hirst, in any of the valleys, or at their own house, which he had been much fonder of visiting lately than was agreeable to any one within its walls. This caution was not given in any doubt of his daughter, but to prevent the possibility of any unknown evil coming from that quarter. Lucy did not need any such warning, for she knew too well her own danger, or rather she knew what anger, and misery, and disturbance of spirit there would be at Bracken Braes, if her father had been aware of Mr. Cranstoun's repeated attempts to gain upon her vanity, her simplicity, her ignorance, or her weakness — and Lucy was willing enough to confess, that all these might belong to her character.

His sole desire and determination, since Henry Cranstoun had first seen Lucy Forester, was to get her into his power, and carry her off with him to the Continent. What was she but a peasant's daughter ? Her father, to be sure, was a man far beyond the common run — and he was also a blind man, who would sorely miss the child heard for so many years in his darkness. Lucy was likewise, humbly born as she was, his own sister's bosom friend ; and her kindness, it was said, had even saved Emma's life. She was also a perfectly happy creature ; and to destroy great human happiness, requires a cold, or a stern, or a fierce heart. But then she was beautiful — ay, beautiful as an angel, and not less innocent — and his heart, which had so long been the victim, the slave of passion, beat, and leaped, and bounded at the forethought of all that angelical beauty and innocence being prest in transport to his bosom, although afterwards might come shame, sorrow, despair, and death.

Had Lucy known all that the heart of Henry Cranstoun had planned against her, sooner would the small singing bird have left the hawthorn hedge when it saw the merlin on the wing, than she have forsaken for an hour the shel-

ter of Bracken Braes. But innocence suspects not, nor if it did, could penetrate into the dark secrets of that heart from which pity, and honor, and religion are all flung aside; and nothing heard, felt, or obeyed, but the cry of passion, unresisted in its long career and conquest of crime and misery.

Henry Cranstoun had had his spies and emissaries at watch and at work through all the parish. He knew every step that Lucy took half a mile from Bracken Braes. Did she go to Raeshaw, to Ladyside, to the Manse, to Ewebank, to any hut without even a name, her visit, if one that had been previously intended, was already known to him at the Hirst. He had sometimes been at her side among the braes, as if he had risen out of the earth, and had come carelessly and accidentally into the solitary dwellings where Lucy perhaps had gone to see some sick or dying person, or to offer some charitable office to the poor. He stood not in awe of that God whose servant the young, the humble, innocent, and happy creature was upon those affecting occasions; and he would have ruined the soul of her whom he might have beheld kneeling in prayer by the sick-beds of the widow and the orphan, or gliding home to her blind father's dwelling with a song that cheered the solitary braes, and seemed to leave its music in the wild moors. Her innocence, he saw, could never be corrupted — but it might be betrayed; and were Lucy Forester away with him into another country — away beyond the seas — cut off from Bracken Braes by hundreds of leagues of land and seas, with all their mountains and waves, might she not perhaps become his in her homeless, hopeless destitution and despair, and might not his joy, his happiness, his bliss be perfect at last in that sacrifice?

But, Emma Cranstoun, although she had never breathed a syllable of her suspicions to her brother, had been, for some time, more unhappy and afraid even than Lucy herself, of his wicked designs. Indeed, it was her miserable conviction of some meditated evil, too dreadful even to be alluded to, that finally determined her to leave the Hirst, and to take Lucy with her to Ballendean. Mi-

chael and Agnes, although almost daily expecting a visit from Miles Colinson, did not think of making any objections to this plan, under circumstances which they fully understood, without putting that lady under any necessity of entering into any lengthened explanation; so it was fixed that Emma Cranstoun was to send over a servant for Lucy next evening, and that she should accompany herself and Mrs. Ramsay to Ballendean, where they would remain till her brother and his companions left the Hirst.

CHAPTER XLVI.

LUCY had left Bracken Braes in the evening, on Emma Cranstoun's own palfrey, under care of a servant; and Mary Morrison had tripped on foot by her side, as far as the well-known Gowan Green. There she had parted from her friend with a kiss, and kept her eyes upon her till she saw the horses following the bridle road towards Ewebank. "Ay, ay!" said Mary to herself, "Lucy is just going round by the house where I used to live, to take a look at the sweet birchwood, where we have so often sat together, in days when I was as happy and as innocent as herself!" — and then returned to the Heriot Water.

Michael never slept very soundly when Lucy was from home; and he now rose in the gloaming, before the sun had shone his disk over Raven Crag, or awakened a bird in the eaves or the plane tree. It was the dawn of the 12th of August; and no sooner had the light broken, than the frequent gun of the fowler was heard on the hills. A foot came up the avenue, and a voice said — "Mr. Forester, here is a letter from the Hirst." Michael took it to Agnes. It was from the lady herself; and expressed much surprise that Lucy Forester had not, according to agreement, come to the Hirst; with tender

inquiries as to the cause of her not appearing — which, she trusted, was not illness, either of herself or any one at Bracken Braes.

Every inmate was soon up; and a dire and dismal distraction, in which reason itself was baffled, prevailed over the whole family. Their fears all connected themselves with Henry Cranstoun; but nobody yet expressed them, till Michael himself said — “Let us trust in that God who has never yet forsaken us, and whose providence, although often inscrutable, will not suffer our child to be destroyed!” But every minute brought its own horrid thought; and there was an uncertain and hurried walking about, as if the tenement had been on fire.

Mary Morrison, who had gone out to speak with the person who had brought the letter, came back with a quick pace to the room, and said — “Here is Mr. Miles Colinson — here is Mr. Miles Colinson!” Aunt Isobel — for Michael and Agnes were sitting in a sort of stupor — went and brought him in, after telling him, in a few words, at what crisis he had arrived. “You have come to us just when we have lost our Lucy, Mr. Colinson. A villain has taken her from us — from Agnes there, and me, her blind father; and dreadful are the decrees of the Most Merciful and the Most High!”

It seemed that nothing was in their power to do, any more than if they had all been chained in a dungeon. Into what quarter of the horizon should the pursuers go? Hours — hours — many long hours had there been — a whole night of hours — since Lucy had fallen into the fatal snare. As well go seek for a dropped pearl from the hair, over the bounds of a great forest, as seek for Lucy Forester now among all those mountains! The light of morn must have found her far — far off from Bracken Braes; or perhaps the light of morn may not yet have visited her weeping eyes in some dark den, known only to that pitiless Atheist.

Perhaps Miles Colinson was now a more miserable man even than Michael Forester. He had come to woo his bride in her father’s house; and, lo! she had been

carried off by a ravisher. Yet, wicked as the world is, there are bounds, he thought and said, set to wickedness, which even a demon from below could not have power to overleap; and a hope came, even from his being the brother of Emma Cranstoun, that Lucy might find mercy at his hands. They all knew that Lucy would walk into a burial vault, and be left there to die of hunger, rather than break one of God's commandments. A sort of wild joy was in Michael's broken voice, as he cried out — "O that she had the wings of a dove, that she might come flying back to her blind father!" — "Fear it not, fear it not," said Aunt Isobel — now too old to weep, but whose hope was strong as possession, both of this world and the world beyond the grave — "safe is she at this hour, wherever she be, as the youths in the fiery furnace; nor shall a hair of her head be skaithed."

Mary Morrison now mentioned that Lucy had left the direct road to the Hirst, and had gone up the brae towards Ewebank. A sort of light glimmered in upon Michael's mind. As Ewebank was a very lonely place, it was possible that his daughter had been wiled away thither by some pretence; and he called to mind, too, that it was now inhabited by a person of no very good character, who hung loose on society, and did not follow any regular profession. Such place, and such person, seemed well fitted for the nefarious wickedness he feared; and the blind man, taking his staff, requested Miles Colinson to accompany him to Ewebank.

When they reached that solitary house, no smoke came from the chimney, and nothing was stirring about it any more than if it had been uninhabited. The door was locked, the window-shutters closed, or rather the light excluded by boards, and branches of broom and fern. Miles Colinson heard nothing; but Michael said — "There are people in the house: I hear footsteps and whispering." No answer being given to their words, Michael Forester put his hand and foot to the door, and it flew open like that of a childish plaything. Wat Armstrong met him in the passage with a fierce countenance; but Miles Colinson was not a man to be intimidated, and

stepped forward between the blind man and his opponent. "Is the tenant of this house at home?" said Michael; "and if so, why has he barricaded his door?" It was too late to offer resistance to the resolute blind man and his friend; for Lucy had heard their voices, and was already in her father's arms. There too was Henry Cranstoun, the representative of an ancient and honorable family, standing like a condemned felon, in a clay-built hut, on his own hereditary estate.

Lucy Forester's eyes were red with weeping — her cheeks dim in the rosy beauty which no agony could altogether blanch — and her silken hair, which almost one single touch of her hand could trick into graceful wreaths, sorely dishevelled. But now there was perfect restoration brought to her disturbed spirit — her kindling smiles revived; and, kneeling down, she gave thanks to the Great Power that had protected her innocence. "I offered no violence to your daughter, Mr. Forester — I loved her, and I repent of my gross misconduct. What more can I do? — Tell what amends I can make. The best farm on the estate will be yours, rent free." — "Base robber, speak not to me of farms and rents — the dead ground, and the worthless dross; but look into my face — behold how God has been pleased to extinguish these eyes within their sockets, and then tremble lest his vengeance smite you dead in your sins. Lucy, my beloved child, rise up — rise up;" for Michael felt her clasped hands resting on his knees, and his tears of thankfulness fell down upon her forehead, as her eyes, that had just been turned to heaven, now calmly contemplated her father's countenance. Miles Colinson gazed on that sight, and so received it into his very soul, that fade away would it never more till the last hour of his life. But the betrayer could not endure the scene before him, and disappeared.

Rescued from that horror, Lucy looked on Miles Colinson as her deliverer. He it was that now raised her in his arms from the floor, and felt privileged, in her father's presence, to press her to his bosom. There was no one

in the hut but themselves, the storm was over, and there was now almost a perfect calm; nor was Lucy released from that gentle embrace, till she heard an earnest prayer breathed close to her cheek, that Heaven would inspire her heart with affection, and grant such a wife to one who would cherish and guard her like a sacred thing. That prayer was not unheard by the blind man; and he blessed them both, as they stood together by his side, and called them by one name — “My children!”

CHAPTER XLVII.

MICHAEL FORESTER would have spared him who had wickedly designed to rob him of his all, the shame of exposure; but rumors soon ran from house to house among the braes, like echoes; and, before night, the whole parish was stirred with indignant reprobation. Such profligacy appalled every parent — the rescue of the innocent came home to every heart; and here, there was not a single circumstance of extenuation — on the contrary, all was hideously and impiously cruel. Will Michael Forester continue to live, after such an outrage, at Bracken Braes? Ought not punishment to be inflicted on the criminal? Such thoughts were at every fireside; and he, who could so easily have had his name pronounced with constant blessings, was now cursed as an evil spirit that had come to ruin the peace of families, and to spread corruption over the whole country side.

Next morning was the Sabbath, and the family from Bracken Braes went, as usual, to the place of worship. In the kirkyard, one subject alone was spoken of among the various groups assembled there; and when Mr. Forester appeared, walking between his wife and daughter, although no one alluded, in the most distant way, to the events of the preceding day, the salutations they received

from every quarter were most earnest, and sufficiently expressed the general sympathy. There, too, was the Lady of the Hirst, evidently looking around for one family. She soon discovered Lucy, and, putting her arm within her's, she took her up to her own seat in the gallery. The eyes of the whole congregation approved; and Mr. Kennedy himself gave Lucy a look of kind recognition from the pulpit.

As the congregation was dismissing, words of shocking import spread from one person to another, till there was a general consternation. The lady's brother had been found, during the very time Divine worship had been performing, lying in a lonesome place within the Hirst woods, mortally wounded. It was rumored that there had been a duel, and that all the gentlemen residing at the hall had fled. Emma Cranstoun's ears could not but receive the fatal tidings, even before she had left her seat in the kirk, and while she was whispering in a low voice to Lucy about the unhappy man now dying or dead.

Before evening, Michael, Agnes, and Lucy, were all three at the Hirst. The lady had indeed need of comfort now, for her brother's eyes were shut for ever — his career of guilt at an end — without more than a few — a very few agonized, or fainting hours, for repentance. Two strangers had that morning come to the Hirst, and they had again left it, but not till, from the hand of one of them, Henry Cranstoun had received his death wound. Emma had not even the melancholy comfort to know that his fate had been undeserved; for, almost his last words were to say, that Captain Lorimer had behaved like a man of honor, and that he had justly punished with death his sister's seducer.

The feelings which now wrung Emma Cranstoun's heart were not those of grief and pity alone, but of a more awful and overwhelming nature. Till within these very few months, she had never been with her brother, except that one week at Rome. But natural affection does not wait even for worth to awaken it; and her heart had yearned towards him in the midst of those vices which it

bled to think of, and would have died to cure. Not a pleasing, or fine, or good trait in his character, but she had fixed her eyes upon it alone, with the loving hope of being able to exaggerate it into a virtue. But now, there he lay, with all that once ardent blood, cold as the frozen stream—that face, whose changeful features kindled every hour with the expression of so many passions, had now but one meaning—rest, eternal rest! The soul—the immortal soul—had gone to judgment; and even in the Book of Mercy are there not dreadful images of the world to come?

The Lady of the Hirst had many friends in her own rank of life, for she never had had any wish to seclude herself from society, which she both enjoyed and adorned; and in this great distress there were more than one whose presence would have been a comfort. But during the first days of death, the house stands silent; and dearest friends do not feel privileged to look on the mourner's face till the final ceremony is over, and all vanished. Lucy Forester, however, remained on that Sabbath evening when the others went away, and for several nights occupied the bed where she had so often lain whole nights without sleeping when it was thought the lady was dying of a consumption; and her presence was again a greater blessing than could be told, during the midnight hours, when grief comes upon the very dreams of those who weep.

There was a burial place about half a mile from the hall, in an old wood; an open space had been left, centuries ago, when the acorns were planted, and in it a mausoleum had been built. The arms of the oaks had extended farther, perhaps, than had been contemplated, and one enormous tree flung a mossy limb across the melancholy lawn, quite close to the gateway of the tomb. All about the dark walls were yews that shrouded it in perpetual gloom; and the sound of a stream, flowing in the forest, might sometimes be heard, and sometimes not, by any solitary person wandering into that stern seclusion. The martins built their nests in crevices of the somewhat

dilapidated building; and the roes, knowing how unfrequented was the place, harbored below that grove, and among its surrounding thickets.

The whole tenantry followed the bier to this burial-place; the iron gate once more recoiled on its rusty hinges, and the remains of Henry Cranstoun were left to moulder away among the bones of his ancestors. All reproachful thoughts were dead. Had he lived, he might have become a better — a good man — even a Christian; for what revolutions have taken place in those spiritual kingdoms, the souls of men; and with these, and such reflections, silent or expressed, the funeral party dissolved away among the woods.



CHAPTER XLVIII.

LUCY remained for a week after the funeral with Emma Cranstoun; nor did one strong wish to be at Bracken Braes, notwithstanding the presence there of one so dear, enter a heart so filled as her's was with pity and friendship. The rueful calamity was such as to hinder, during its first dark days, the movement of all deep feelings on any other subject; and although there were, in both their breasts, feelings so very deep as never again to be obliterated, yet the images of Edward Ellis and Miles Colinson either did not rise up before them at all, or if they did, each image was contemplated with perfect freedom from any agitating emotion, by her to whom it was more especially interesting; for in such hearts as theirs, love, instead of swallowing up in its own passionate selfishness every other feeling, strengthens and purifies them, lending to them all much of its own enthusiastic and spiritual nature. At the end of a week, Lucy returned to Bracken Braes.

Almost unconsciously had these lovers been betrothed;

but on their very first meeting, they remembered that the betrothment had received the fervent blessings of their father. Few words had been uttered at that disturbed time, but these few bound their hearts for life with all the sanctity of an oath, felt to be inviolable. Little or no agitating passion had preceded their declarations of everlasting attachment — indeed, with Lucy, the charm of her love to her own spirit was its perfect peace. Since last summer, when her lover began first to be dear, she had been carried away down the quiet hours imperceptibly into the final calm of their affection — as a boat, in which two friends are sitting, may drift away down the dream-like scenery of some river, till it is found anchored in a beautiful lake.

All their roamings, last summer, over the braes, and through the woods, had been as happy as they had then desired life to be ; but the earth was now greener to their eyes, and the heaven bright even without its sunshine. Then, their parties had been larger — for Ruth, and Mary Morrison, and Martha, were generally there ; and the spirit that seemed chiefly to animate them, was the natural gaiety of youthful existence. But now Lucy and Miles walked all alone into the secluded glens — and all alone reclined by the murmurs of the solitary rivulets. There was no merriment — no laughter — sometimes not many words. Thoughts and feelings often rose up into looks and smiles ; and when the lovers were mute in the solitude, the silence was divine. Day after day they felt themselves more and more belonging exclusively to one another — and dreams of the future brought a tenderer light upon the sunshine of their present happiness. “ O beautiful Ellesmere ! ” breathed Lucy in a whisper to her lover ; and as her head rested on his bosom, she asked her heart with a self-upbraiding sigh, if it were, indeed, possible that hour had come when she could think of leaving her blind father without his Lucy at Bracken Braes !

The long-continued and habitual moderation of spirit belonging to Michael Forester in his resigned blindness, was scarcely proof against the intense happiness which

rose from the prospect of Lucy's marriage. Although his daughter had been, from the first day of his loss of sight, so necessary to him, that, without her guiding voice and hand, he would, probably, never have learned to extend the circle of his unattended walks beyond the gate of the avenue, and although her presence in the room had, for years, been a sort of sunshine, which even the blind could see, yet Michael felt, on the present occasion, that it had, all along, been her happiness that was his comfort, and that to lose her, since that happiness was about to be increased, so far from being any rational cause of sorrow, ought, and assuredly would, increase tenfold the gratitude of those left behind at Bracken Braes. The events of the last few days had shewn what evils might gather around her beauty; and if her father should die, what might become of Lucy in this bewildering world? But now there were to be two nests for the dove; and should the winds injure or blow down the one at Bracken Braes, the other might still be her's in the sheltered vale of Ellesmere.

The same feelings possessed the maternal bosom of the gentle Agnes. She had never feared for Lucy, except when she thought of her somewhat warm and impetuous character, rather too apt to give way to sudden emotion, and to urge her forwards incautiously at least, if not imprudently, upon the path her heart had chosen. Yet Lucy had never yielded to, or obeyed any strong impulse, unless it prompted to deeds of kindness and humanity; and her mother rather trembled at the possibility of her being led astray, than from the recollection of any instances in which her conduct could be justly reprehended. Lucy's ardor and fearlessness in all innocent pursuits — her disposition to revel in joy the very instant she left her blind father's side — her utter incapacity of suspicion, or of belief in guile or wickedness — her quick, eager temper, whose anger was neither more boisterous nor permanent than the breeze that comes rustling down the birch wood and in a minute forsakes the leaves — and her readiness to sacrifice anything, however sweet to herself, to the more insignificant interests of her friends — nay, even

her acquaintances. All these traits in her character, at once endearing to others, and dangerous to the lovely creature herself, had often disturbed her mother's sleep. But under the safeguard of such a husband as Miles Colinson, all these qualities would be sources of happiness alone — time, instead of blighting, would beautify such flowers as these — and she could not but be a happy wife who had, in the sight of men, angels, and the Almighty, been the best and most blessed of daughters. Already was the expression of her bright eyes somewhat subdued; her steps were gliding into a slower gait, in its gentleness almost matronly; the tears were sometimes seen on her cheek, probably as she dreamed of leaving them all at Bracken Braes; and, in truth, Lucy Forester sometimes already bore almost the placid, quiet, and thoughtful countenance of a bride.

The month of August had gone, and the first half of the beautiful September, that seemed almost to court the first stealing touches of the frost. It was time for Miles Colinson to return to Ellesmere, and Lucy was contented not to see him again till the following June. Why should they hasten their marriage? Lucy was not yet eighteen, although she wanted but a few months of that age — months that could bring no accession to her loveliness, although they would, doubtlessly, bring knowledge and wisdom to a heart awakened to a new and sacred passion. A few months' longer possession of their dutiful child, was something to her father and mother; and Lucy, in the blissful calm of her affection for Miles Colinson, could have been happy so long as he was so, in years of betrothed separation. Next summer, then, they were to be married; and Aunt Isobel, who frequently spoke of her own death with as much cheerfulness as she could do of going to bed after a busy day, said that she would pray to be allowed to be present at that wedding, and then care not about seeing another Christmas. "The dear bairn will be little more than eighteen years old on that day, and I upwards of four-score and five — but, Heaven preserve us! what fine madam is this at the door? Come ben, Miss or Mistress — how is your lady, owre by yon-

der at the hall?" This fine madam, as Aunt Isobel called her, was Emma Cranstoun's Swiss maid — a very excellent, kind creature, in her way, although fond of lace, veils, and feathers, to a degree that excited the wonder of the whole parish. Her head, at this particular time, nodded lugubriously like the plumes of a hearse; although her face was all one smile, and her gesticulation, as she gave Lucy a letter, expressive of a general delight — not so much proceeding from any one specific cause, as from the vivacity of her own peculiar and national character. The letter merely informed Lucy that the Lady of the Hirst would, by the time it was received, be on her way on foot, and with a friend, by the Gowan Green path, to Bracken Braes.

Lucy and Miles Colinson immediately set out to meet the lady; and, before they had gone two miles, the parties were all together in a lonesome nook among the hills — Emma Cranstoun and Edward Ellis, Lucy Forester and Miles Colinson, meeting at the Hawk Stane Spring! Edward and Lucy had a dream of their own; and, after the first emotion, it was far from being undelightful. There they had stood, a few years ago, as they thought, as indeed they were — in love — the pure, imaginative, visionary love of youth, as yet equally ignorant of itself and the world. There were innocent and blameless secrets, that needed not to be revealed to any ear; too dim, in the distance of the past, to be distinctly remembered, even by their own hearts; too vague and worldless to be communicated; and, as Edward turned towards his Emma, and Lucy looked at Miles Colinson, without any perceptible embarrassment, and with sentiments of mutual admiration and esteem — they who had journeyed together over the moonlight hills, and almost slept in each other's innocent arms — saluted each other as friends, who at last possessed the happiness appropriate to their condition, and would remain friends, in the best sense of the word, throughout life.

CHAPTER XLIX.

WHETHER has the lover of nature's works — the solitary pedestrian, who finds beauty everywhere without seeking for it — had most delight, in his roaming reveries among the pastoral paradise of Scotland, where his imagination, lending its own light to the scenery and the people, has restored the age of gold — or among some of the richer valleys of merry England, where there is little need for fiction to embellish or change the truth, but almost every human habitation is indeed a perfect picture, ready formed to the eye of taste or genius? Perhaps remembrances come in such crowds upon the mind, that delights to embody all its visions of the past, that there is a confusion of feelings, leaving no distinctive judgment of the peculiar characteristics of those two beautiful kingdoms. Then too, for one scene vividly remembered, a hundred are well nigh forgotten. Entire days — walks by the sides of lochs and rivers, are as if they had never been — unnumbered glorious sunsets have been in vain shewn to ungrateful worshippers — cataracts are pealing in the solitude, once visited in awe, and since heard no more — and the thunder storms that shook the everlasting mountains, have not left in the imagination so much as a whisper. Which country then shall be said to be the most impressive — and what pilgrim shall declare the judgment?

But let the decision of such questions be left to the poet and the painter; and let Agnes, and Lucy, and Mary Morrison, and even old Aunt Isobel, judge for themselves of the comparative merit of Ellesmere and Bracken Braes. For Michael Forester and all his family are at the Vicarage; and a brighter, perhaps so bright a June never glittered on the lone banks of the sweet Heriot Water and the braes of Holylee, as now glitters on Risedale Beck, wherever its streams and pools are open to the day, among meadows forever losing themselves in the overshadowing woods of Ellesmere.

It was no less than four years ago since Agnes and Lucy were at the Vicarage; and much as they had then loved and admired it, it seemed now to them both a place whose delightful character they had not in the least understood. Every day gave them an insight into the meaning of every object they beheld; and they discovered, of themselves, reasons why the beauty of the vale was so various, and never could be injured. Miles Colinson showed them the very spirit of the place; and Lucy every night lay down with some new charm mingling in the scenery of her dreams. Here she was to live — here most probably die — and in the church-yard of the chapel, at the foot of those great mountains, her bones would be laid along with those of the Colinsons, who had been dwellers in the vale of Ellesmere for several centuries. Melancholy thoughts often arise out of our very happiest hopes, and indeed seem almost inseparable from them; for hopes are onward gazing, and the vista has, and can have at last, but one termination. But this union of the sweetness and the sadness of fancy is perhaps the most blissful of all moods of mind; and youthful lovers feel it to be so, when to their approaching happiness there seems to be no other alloy, but the knowledge of the frailty of human nature, and of the sudden obscuration or eclipse, to which the light of all human happiness is everlastingly exposed.

The lovers thought themselves happy — the happiest living beings on all the earth; but Michael Forester and his Agnes were far happier. The blind father had always been a thoughtful, never a melancholy man; yet if all the sad feelings that had assailed his heart on Lucy's account for the last seven or eight years had been collected together, they would have made up a great sum of sorrow. All were now at an end; and not only so, but vivid and rejoicing emotions took their place, so that even Agnes herself, whose eyes had never been off her blind husband's countenance for one daylight hour together, since the lightning had passed over it, could not help wondering at the change, and felt as if the same sedate cheerfulness of his manly beauty, which won her heart at Dovenest so

long ago, had been restored. But just as great a change had been wrought on Agnes herself, and Michael perceived it in her voice. Much of that same glad tone returned to it, with which she had charmed every heart in the years of her maidenhood — and for years too of her wedded life, when Lucy was a mere sportful child, for whom it was needless yet to cherish any mournful fears. Agnes Hay was indeed almost in the very prime of life; and Michael believed Aunt Isobel, when she said, that her child was still as beautiful as the day when she was a bride.

The marriage day was now near at hand; and there was not in all Westmoreland a prettier cottage than the one ready for the reception of Miles Colinson and his Lucy. It had been built, about two years before, by the vicar's only brother, Mr. Brathwaite Colinson, a London solicitor, who had returned, rich, to pass his latter days in the quiet of his native valley. But the old gentleman felt Oldfield to be somewhat too dull and lonely for one of his metropolitan habits, and had taken refuge in the Vicarage. There he had his own parlor looking into the orchard — a room full of many gimcracks — for the solicitor was something of a mechanic — and had a box of tools, by means of which, he bodied forth many things unknown, and invented very extraordinary pieces of ornamental furniture. Few men made angling rods better than he; and he had been engaged for nearly three years on a fiddle, which it seemed likely he would leave in an unfinished state. But Brathwaite Colinson had a heart as warmly affectionate as when he left Ellesmere fifty years ago in a suit of country gray; and although he had loved to accumulate money, he himself now rejoiced to feel that he was no miser, and determined to make his nephew, Miles, independent before his marriage. At the very first sight of Lucy Forester, his heart was more than ever expanded with an emotion of permanent generosity, and he loved her as well as his own niece Ruth.

But although Oldfield had seemed a dull residence to an old bachelor like the solicitor, it was in truth one of the most cheerful places imaginable, and the most beauti-

ful too in all Ellesmere. The house seemed to be situated low, for it was surrounded by knolls, rocks, hills, and mountains; but it in fact stood at a considerable elevation above the stream; and a sloping lawn carried the eye gently down to a waterfall — for the close nibbling sheep had made a lawn of a field, whose daisies and clover had not been disturbed by the plough in man's memory, although ridges were still visible. Brathwaite Colinson loved too well the picturesque architecture of the Westmoreland cottages, to build on his farm of Oldfield a town house, or suburban box, or rural villa. He had only to look at the Vicarage itself, and an edifice rose up, another and the same, with such varieties, as imagination, in this case little more than memory, easily created. The roof might almost be said to undulate, when the eye looked down on its angular and irregular terraces — latticed windows peeped out unexpectedly, each upon its own home view or far mountain prospect — and the round tall chimneys carried the smoke well up among the trees, that, in a year or two, must be felled, else they would infallibly overshadow the house in the strongest sunshine.

During each of the years that the Foresters had lived at Bracken Braes, some small new article of furniture had crept into the house; so that, at an expense quite imperceptible — even to them who were almost poor — it was, within, like the ornamented cottage of some tasteful man of fortune. Lucy had the whole furnishing of Oldfield left entirely to her own judgment; and, on consulting her lover, was pleased to be told, “make it as like as you can to Bracken Braes.” But this Lucy did not wish altogether to do; for she loved the old, glossy, dark oak-wood furniture of the Westmoreland houses, with all its ancient and not inelegant carved work, and, fond as she was of Scotland, and all that belonged to it, she did not forget that the taste and imagination of every one are formed in those delightful days, when every household object has a charm which will belong forever to all that is peculiar to the country where we were born and passed our youth.

Ruth Colinson was not to be, as she had rashly promised, bridesmaid to Lucy Forester; and for the best of all reasons — she was to be married herself, on the same day, to Captain Marshall of Seathwaite Hall, Ullswater. Well did Lucy yet remember his kind and manly countenance, and that too of his pretty sister, the joyful Agatha. Agatha was now already engaged to be brides-maid to Ruth; and Lucy had, therefore, in that extremity, to apply to Ellinor Elleray of Rydal, half-afraid — and not more than half-afraid — that her own beauty might be eclipsed by that celebrated May-day Queen.

CHAPTER L.

ELLESMERE had dawned forth into faint and softest beauty, “under the opening eyelids of the morn,” as the dewy hours melted away before the bolder light; the woods and groves were all crowned with their green and yellow glories; and, by ten o’clock — the appointed time for the marriage party to leave the Vicarage and proceed to the chapel — all nature was rejoicing in a summer forenoon, as bright, blue, and cloudless as ever shone over heaven.

There had, for more than one hour, been a pleasant agitation at the heart of the Vicarage. Not a few hands had been busily and tenderly engaged in adorning the brides. That duty had been left to the young. Agnes and the vicar’s wife sat with their husbands; while Aunt Isobel and the old solicitor were strolling in the orchard. How blessed was the composure of this solemn morn! Two young, innocent, and happy creatures were about to enter on the paths of a new life. Some troubles must attend those paths — many might infest them; but when Lucy and Ruth appeared in their white bridal dresses,

simple as simple might be, yet not without their appropriate ornaments, the hearts of their parents burned within them, and all the future seemed full of sunshine. Michael would fain have beheld his Lucy — grateful would he have been to Heaven for one glimpse of vision — but that was a transient wish of exceeding love, and, kissing her cheek as she sat on the same chair, her blind father was satisfied.

The marriage party were just about to leave the Vicarage, when all the dogs about the place, no small number, including several nondescripts belonging to the solicitor, set up a barking, that was answered by a general caw from the rooks on the Elm Grove. The narrow avenue, or approach, was not formed for such splendid equipage as that which now appeared at the gallop. The kine stared and wondered from beyond the high stone wall, or scampered off unwieldily in distant imitation of the motions of the four beautiful blood horses that waited along the Lady of the Hirst; while wide open eyes, from kitchen, byre, and barn door, devoured the miraculous spectacle. A stronger sensation could not have been produced by the descent of the grand coronation balloon.

The Lady of the Hirst, now no more Emma Cranstoun, descended gracefully from her carriage, assisted by her husband, Edward Ellis, and embraced Lucy Forester. Lucy had written to her as soon as she had fixed her marriage day; and the lady, being on her own bridal tour, had come to grace the nuptials. But no time was to be lost; for the chapel bell, so calm and clear was the atmosphere, was absolutely heard tinkling with joy far away up the glen; not a few flags were seen raised up over the tops of cottages, in honor, probably, of the gallant captain; and now and then was heard a discharge of small artillery, borrowed for the occasion from Bowness and Lowood, whose tourists, for one day, would be cheated out of their somewhat extravagant echoes. The Lady of the Hirst — for so let her still be called — took her beloved Lucy into her landau, along with her bridesmaid, Ellinor of Rydal, and meek Mary Morrison,

the faithful and affectionate, whom she had recognised and saluted with her most gracious smiles. Other vehicles, neat enough in their way, formed in the rear; and, although the road to the chapel was rather rough and angular, and at many turns seemingly shut up by old ivied pollard stumps, or moss-grown walls, built up, cairn-like, of stones cleared from the fields they enclosed, yet the chapel was soon gained in safety, and, in about one hour, Lucy and Ruth returned to the Vicarage, as Mrs. Colinson of Oldfield, Ellesmere, and Mrs. Marshall of Seathwaite Hall, Ullswater.

Two or three hours of quiet converse passed away, during which Miles Colinson cheerfully resigned his Lucy to the Lady of the Hirst; but as it was not a very short, and by no means a very level road to Seathwaite Hall, over Kirkston and Place Fell, an entertainment which, in deference and respect to the fashionable world, let be called a *Dejeune a la fourchette*, was with no delay spread below the yew tree. The vicar's wife and Agnes sat together at the head — the vicar and Michael Forester at the foot of the table. The blushing Lucy and Ruth were seated beside their respective bridesmaids; and Mary Morrison was not far from the side of her who was dearest and kindest on the earth to that widow and orphan. The bridegrooms assumed already a somewhat important air, and endeavored to seem as becomingly composed as Edward Ellis, who was now quite an old married man; for the beauty of his bride had disturbed the Sabbath devotion of two congregations — one in town, and the other in country. Uncle Brathwaite and Aunt Isobel were the merriest of the company.

But who were those three humble looking persons entering the gate, while a young woman advanced a little before the others, with familiar but not obtrusive steps, towards the Vicarage? "Good heavens!" cried Mary Morrison, "can that be Martha, and Hamish, and Flora Fraser!" It was so indeed — and Martha had an infant at her bosom! The emigrants had returned from Canada; but old Donald Fraser was not with them: They

had left his bones in a burial-place in the woods. Martha soon told her story. The brother whom Donald had gone to visit, had died soon after the old soldier, and left property to Hamish and Flora worth nearly three hundred pounds. With such a sum they resolved to return to their dear Highlands; and having landed at Liverpool, Martha could not think of passing on to Scotland without stepping aside for a day to see the old people with whom she had formerly lived, and her friends at the Vicarage. Had such a meeting as this been described in a novel, it would no doubt have been criticised as too improbable; but Martha and Lucy had each her own romance of real life, and thus far it had been, although sometimes a little dim or dark, on the whole not undelightful. Martha was happy at the thought of passing her days in the Highlands, somewhere in the Glen of Dee, or in Glen Tilt, or on the banks of the Bruar, or by the waterfalls of the Tummel, or the sylvan shores of Loch Rannoch. Those names she pronounced readily, and even with something of a Highland accent — for her husband Hamish had taught her some Gaelic, and in that language she now hushed her little Canadian, awaking from his dream in her bosom.

The Lady of the Hirst bade them all farewell, not without Miles Colinson's promise to bring his wife to Holylee next summer. Captain Marshall bore off his Ruth in triumph; and Miles and Lucy, attended by Mary Morrison, had walked away unnoticed to their own house at Oldfield. The emigrants were most welcome indeed at the Vicarage, in the silence of that evening. Martha had not a little to tell, and Aunt Isobel did not let her rest a minute, with questions put half in kindness and half in curiosity — since the old lady, in the perfect satisfaction of her spirit, could afford to forget her Lucy, and keenly interest herself about Martha's past and future concerns; for short as her time was now to be in this world, she still regarded those whose term there be might a prolonged one, with the unabated warmth of a heart that could be made cold only in the grave.

As for Michael and Agnes, they retired that evening sooner than usual to their own room. They had not lost a daughter, but they had found a son. Should Providence permit, the families at Oldfield and Bracken Braes were to visit each other year about; and to that Providence, whatever might be its decrees, they knelt down in prayer as happy as any of its creatures below heaven.





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